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The gendered contexts of screenwriting work
Socialized recruitment and judgments of taste and talent in the UK film industry

Wreyford, Natalie Louise

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The gendered contexts of screenwriting work:
socialized recruitment and judgments of taste and
talent in the UK film industry.

Natalie Wreyford

A thesis submitted to the Department of Culture, Media
and Creative Industries at King's College London for the
Degree of Doctor in Philosophy, London, September 2015

Declaration

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is my own with all references cited accordingly, and that the word limit does not exceed that prescribed in the College regulations.

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I dedicate this thesis to female screenwriters everywhere, especially those who have never written a word.

Abstract

A substantial amount of data is available to illustrate just how few films have women in key creative positions, and how little the situation is changing. Critical sociological studies of work in creative industries have revealed a reestablishment of inequality along traditional lines such as gender but reasons for this continued inequality has only recently become a focus of creative labour studies. This thesis examines the dynamics of socialized recruitment processes that rely on subjective judgments of creative talent and ability. I identify the rhetorical work done in the UK film industry whereby these practices have become accepted as natural and unproblematic even by those they seemingly disadvantage. It is informed by key thinking from the fields of creative industries, cultural studies and gender and work, and introduces new empirical data from interviews with screenwriters and their employers, to examine how inequality of opportunity is sustained through structural and subjective mechanisms that are not held accountable through equal opportunities policies. Using a Bourdieusian framework I will consider how success in creative work is less attributable to qualifications and experience than to social, economic and particularly cultural capital and the right habitus. I contend that symbolic violence is used to suppress the very discourse of the experience of women by disallowing their voices to be heard in sufficient variety as authors of feature film screenplays. My study of screenwriting labour offers a more complex explanation than is provided by the usual justifications for the lack of women in key creative roles. In this way I contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequality in creative professions.

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INTRODUCTION

If I was a female writer now I'd think there was no opportunity. If I was a female writer and looked at the stats and looked at the stats again, at what're the chances of getting your projects into production? You'd almost want to give up there and then. I mean what are your chances? You may as well play the lottery.

(Colin, employer)

I open with this evocative quote from one of my research participants as it so clearly illustrates the problem that inspired my thesis. Women still stand far less chance than men of becoming the screenwriter of a film. The numbers are so dismal, and seem so stubbornly averse to change that the few women who succeed feel as rare and exceptional as lottery winners. White, middle and upper class men still dominate the most senior positions in film as well as those roles considered to be the most creative (see for example Bielby, 2009, Bielby and Bielby, 1992, Christopherson, 2009, Cobb, 2014, Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012, Lauzen, 2015). Critical sociological accounts have highlighted the perpetuation of gender and other inequalities in creative work, but analysis of film labour markets in the UK and USA tends to focus on the physical production phase of the industries (Blair, 2000b, Blair, 2003, Blair et al., 2001a, Christopherson, 2008, Christopherson and Storper, 1988). In a labour market where access is notoriously difficult for researchers (Mayer, 2008, Ortner, 2010), film productions provide easily identifiable, more definite and readily-available data sets than the messy, fractured, interminable and often unpaid work that happens prior to the 'green-light'¹. However, by the time "action" has been called, most of the key decisions about both the film's content and the choice of personnel have already been made. It is therefore imperative that creative labour studies turn its attention to this seemingly impenetrable world and starts to interrogate its power structures, means of access and conditions of employment. My research makes a key contribution to this, with a particular focus on the gendered dynamics

¹ A film is considered to have a 'green-light' when all the financing is committed and the project can move from the development phase to pre-production and production.

of work in the UK film industry. By studying screenwriters' working lives and the recruitment processes to which they are subject, I am able to explore how women can become excluded from decisive roles in the genesis of film projects.

In the UK, Creative Skillset is the publically funded organization that carries out censuses and labour market breakdowns in the creative industries. It has consistently circumvented the development sector of the film industry, and, partly as a consequence, often avoids any specific mention of screenwriting as a profession in its data (see <http://www.creativeskillset.org/research/index/> for a list of Skillset publications). However, substantial data is available to illustrate just how few films have a female screenwriter, particularly from the USA but with a growing body of evidence from the UK and internationally (Hunt, 2014, Lauzen, 2015, Rogers, 2007, Steele, 2013, West, 2011). Female creative voices are being largely side-lined or ignored by a significant part of the UK film industry where only around 17% of the writers of films are female (Rogers, 2007, Steele, 2013). However, analysis of the available numeric data on screenwriters (e.g. Bielby and Bielby, 2002, Bielby and Bielby, 1992, Hunt, 2007, Hunt, 2009) rarely includes empirical research. In addition, whilst a body of academic work exists to examine the screenplay itself, very few have explored the workers and their labour. Bridget Conor's (2014) theorization of screenwriting work is a notable and invaluable exception, but outside of her work most accounts of screenwriting work come from historical and autobiographical accounts of Hollywood (see for example Goldman, 1983, Cook, 2015, Hanson, 2010) and do not reflect the working lives of many contemporary screenwriters in the UK, most of whom are struggling to make a living.

There are a small amount of available interviews with screenwriters on the subject of gender (most notably Sinclair et al., 2006, Creative Skillset and WFTV, 2009) but in these accounts there is little or no analysis of the subjective opinions or the context in which

individuals are articulating their beliefs and experiences. My own research is the first comprehensive academic study of the gendered dynamics of screenwriting work in the UK film industry. I examine how screenwriters establish and develop a career in the UK and why men continue to have more success in this profession than women. My interest in this subject emerged from my personal experience working in the UK film industry and in particular in my seven years as Senior Development Executive for the UK Film Council, then the UK government's strategic and funding body for the film industry. During this time I was instrumental in commissioning a scoping study into the situation for women screenwriters (Sinclair et al., 2006), the first study of gender and screenwriting in the UK. The results confirmed my suspicions that women were playing a small and unequal role in the screenwriting of British films.

When I began this PhD I wanted to set the political agenda and argue for change. I wanted to empower women writers and look at the employment issues for all writers in the UK industry. I also wanted to discuss how they might have different outcomes for those of different background or gender. As I have progressed through my literature review, I have discovered how complex and embedded are the issues around gender and work, and have tried to negotiate a balance between understanding and articulating this complexity and wanting to find solutions for a very real situation of inequality. I began by reviewing existing literature on screenwriting, film labour markets, and critical sociological accounts of work in the creative industries, particularly in film. As I will show in the next chapter, these studies have done important work in highlighting the unequal distribution of jobs and opportunities in creative industries, not only by gender but also by race, class and other key categories of analysis such as disability and sexuality.

However, feeling that these analyses had not sufficiently explored the precise ways and mechanisms which create the gendered inequalities in creative professions, I broadened

my reading across a range of disciplines such as feminist theory, gender and work, social psychology and discourse analysis to explore theoretical perspectives on women inside and outside the workplace as well as key thinking on creativity. I felt the need to break out of the creative industries enclave, which can occasionally feel bound to some of the same assumptions about creativity that are found in the industries themselves. I wanted to think about screenwriting as work, good or bad (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2013), as a job like any other (Beck, 2005), in order to problematize some of the beliefs about screenwriting so firmly entrenched in film industry discourses that they have reached an unquestionable, doxic status (Bourdieu, 1977), limiting horizons of possibility and excluding those not able to take up a very narrow subject position.

In analysing my data, I found certain theoretical approaches more helpful than others. Pierre Bourdieu's theories (1977, 1984, 1992) were particularly useful because of his focus on cultural production and consumption and more crucially, for the way that he makes visible – and discussable – how aspects of individuals that are understood to be naturally occurring and inevitable have actually been socially constructed. His dissection of scholastic measurements, judgments of taste and aesthetics, and the way that the dominant classes are able to position their own achievements and dispositions as having more value than those of the dominated, have all been extremely useful to me in understanding how, in the film industry, subjective choices are able to be positioned as market-driven or meritocratic. I will return to this in more detail in Chapter Two. Before that, Chapter One provides the theoretical context for my study. I begin by drawing on a range of academic accounts of work in the cultural and creative industries (from hereon referred to as the CCIs). Next I narrow the focus to look at how work in the film industries has been theorised, both in the UK and further afield, and why it remains attractive. I will then summarize the available data to understand who writes films, and more importantly, what this can tell us about who may be

left out. I draw on studies from the UK and other film industries, in particular Hollywood, for a number of reasons. The USA has led the way in collecting data about film workers over a number of years. Most notably the work done by Martha M. Lauzen at the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego University, California, but also the Writers Guild of America West. I highlight the need for similar longitudinal studies in the UK, which thankfully the AHRC is supporting at Southampton University starting in September 2015.

In the last part of Chapter One, I will look more closely at the role of the employers of screenwriters. Although a diverse category including individuals who work in producing, distributing, development and commissioning roles, I will demonstrate how they all play the part of ‘key intermediaries’ (Christopherson, 2008) and ‘creative managers’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2007) and why this is such a critical role to examine in order to understand the employment prospects of screenwriters. Chapter Two considers how gender has been theorized and establishes how the socially constructed nature of gender has been articulated by a number of leading feminist theorists and how this work has relevance to an understanding of continued inequality in the creative labour market. This will set the theoretical context for my analysis of gender and creative labour in screenwriting. I will discuss how Bourdieu is useful for both an analysis of creative work and can be ‘appropriated’ (Moi, 1991) for a deeper understanding of gendered inequality. Chapter Three outlines my methodological approach and examines particular challenges that I faced on this project.

The next four chapters (4-7) form the substantive core of my thesis in which I present my analysis of the interviews with screenwriters and their employers. Chapter Four examines identifiable discourses of creativity and meritocracy that limit whom is able to take up the subject position of screenwriter. These are held up next to contrasting and often contradictory discourses around collaboration and homophily which are also prevalent. I examine what

work is being done by film workers, who seem to acknowledge some discourses on screenwriting work more readily than others. Chapter Five looks at the recruitment practices to which screenwriters are subject and the types of inherited and embodied capital that are frequently more useful than qualifications or ability. I analyse my participants' talk to illustrate the precise mechanisms of socialized recruitment practices that lead to gendered outcomes.

Chapter Six addresses the still unavoidable question of how motherhood and care of children disproportionately affects women in the workplace. I outline how all women, whether they even want or can have children, are penalized by the assumption that they one day will become mothers. I also look closely at the particular characteristics of creative work such as screenwriting that are as problematic as they appear liberating for those with childcare responsibilities. In the last analysis chapter I build on aspects from each of the preceding analysis chapters and offer a more detailed examination of how Bourdieu's concept of habitus as embodied capital can facilitate an understanding of the continued gendered inequality in screenwriting and other creative careers. I finish with a consideration of the currency of taste in the film industry. Here I am drawing once again on Bourdieu's work on class but demonstrate the equivalent efficacy of his theories for an understanding of gender and taste, and how this translates into a limiting of opportunities for female screenwriters.

The final chapter pulls together the threads of my analysis in order to summarise my conclusions and key contributions. I will also suggest directions for future research that have been brought to light by my work. Finally, I make some brief proposals for workers in the UK film industry. Although my own research journey has led me to an understanding of just how complex and embedded are the causes of gender inequality, I remain motivated to provide useful and practical solutions for the UK film industry, in which I still have many friends and colleagues and continue to feel a part of. I will outline the ways in which my

research informs my own continuing participation in the UK film industry, and provide some recommendations for interested parties who share my desire for more gender equality.

I'd like to finish this introduction with a few words about my focus on gender over other forms of inequality. Without underestimating the different struggles and the incredible diversity within the categories of 'women' and 'non-whites', and whilst being attentive to how gender intersects with other under-represented sections of the population such as the lower classes and BAMEs to produce complex positions of disadvantage, I would like to examine the case of women screenwriters following Herminia Ibarra in suggesting that my "focus here is on the commonalities, rather than the difference between women and racial minorities" (Ibarra, 1993, p.65). These commonalities include underrepresentation "within societal and organizational power elites" (Ibid, p.63), being stereotyped negatively, and having embodied characteristics and habitus that have a "lower status in this society" (Ibid, p.66). I am also drawing on the work done by David Corsun and Wanda Costen in the field of management studies. They suggest that the explanations offered for women and non-white "career stallings" may well apply to anyone who does not fit the dominant able-bodied, heterosexual white male model (2001, p.17). Thus, whilst my focus is particularly on gender inequality, I believe and hope that my research has the potential to open up further discussions of inequality across multiple axes. I hope to improve the odds for anyone who wants to write screenplays, particularly those who do not see themselves reflected in the current demographic very often. In the next chapter I will begin to provide the context for my research by looking at how creative work has been analysed in cultural industries research.

1. SCREENWRITERS: THE INVISIBLE LABOURERS

You're working, you're doing a job and I think it's quite key to remember it all starts with the script and you're the first person on any film. (Emily, screenwriter)

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for a critical evaluation of the possible reasons for the gender imbalance in screenwriting. It provides the discursive context for my own empirical research, which aims to cast a spotlight on the women who may be missing from a profession that is itself under-examined by academics and undervalued by an industry focused on celebrity actors and 'auteur' directors². Angela McRobbie has described "the illegible and invisible characteristics" (2002b, p.105) of many jobs in the creative industries, which operate outside conventional office environments with flexible hours and hidden periods of underemployment. Screenwriting exemplifies this 'invisible' labour. The writers often work alone in their homes and are mostly unrecognisable figures in an industry that is otherwise highly observable, heavily promoted and discussed in all forms of media. Screenwriting has a "particular and marginal" status (Conor, 2014, p.2) as a form of creative labour within both the film industry itself and as compared to other forms of writing and creative labour. Bridget Conor illustrates the affective contradictions felt by screenwriters towards their work, and how many "experienced their labour as highly intensive and personal; individualized and collaborative; competitive and hierarchized; marginalized and elite" (Conor, 2010, p.33).

It is difficult to talk of the screenwriting 'career' since "creative labourers don't have a career, they have informal, insecure and discontinuous employment" (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p.2). Unlike professional writers in other media, such as television writers and novelists, screenwriters are not usually considered to be the principal author of the product they are creating. Film is very much viewed as 'the director's medium', despite the fact that

² 'Auteur' is the French word for 'author' and 'auteur theory' argues that in spite of the collaborative and industrial nature of filmmaking, the director's creative voice is strong enough to be able to attribute the authorship of the film to him or her alone.

screenwriters are “primary creative personnel” to use David Hesmondhalgh’s term (2007, p.64). Screenwriters may work for several years on a film project before a director is even recruited. There is frequently more than one writer on a film and they can work in collaboration or sequence, across many drafts or just one. As a consequence, an individual’s final contribution is often difficult to assess and frequently subject to arbitration. In addition, screenwriters’ work happens outside the concentrated and contained world of the production of the film, in private offices and private homes and most often in isolation. All these facts seemingly make screenwriting difficult to observe, examine and theorize. Screenwriters are not employees of any companies, and often work for free, at the beginning of their careers, or at the beginning of a new project, so that it is difficult to find accurate records of where and when screenwriters are actually working and on what. In addition, most screenplays are never fully realized as films. This means that a significant percentage of many screenwriters’ work is never seen by more than a handful of people. What then of those who don’t even make it into the identifiable pool of workers known as screenwriters? How is it possible to critically examine those who are not even present? Those who have been excluded or who have excluded themselves from this profession?

In order to explore possible reasons for the imbalance between male and female screenwriters in the UK film industry, I will first introduce some of the relevant research and theory from the literature on the creative industries to provide a contextual framework before turning to studies of work in the film industry. Some reasons for the lack of women can be theorized by studying the film labour market and the experiences of those who work within it. I will then outline the extent of the problem for female screenwriters and draw attention to a need for an examination of those who employ them.

1.1 Creative careers in a project based labour market

Before considering how the handful of studies have analysed film work in the UK and further afield, it is useful to reflect briefly on how creative labour has been theorized by a number of leading commentators to establish the importance and wider relevance of the critical examination of such work. A large number of studies have examined the growing importance of creative industries in ‘post-industrial’ societies (e.g. Banks, 2007, Bilton, 2007, Florida, 2004, Gill and Pratt, 2008, McRobbie, 2002a, Hesmondhalgh, 2007), and have argued that independent creative workers are perceived to embody the traits most valued in advanced, neo-liberal economies, such as being entrepreneurial, flexible, networked and self-motivated (Banks, 2007, Christopherson, 2008, Conor, 2010, Gill, 2010, McRobbie, 2002a). In his extensive study of “The Cultural Industries”, David Hesmondhalgh (2007) defines the industries of his focus as “those institutions (mainly profit-making companies, but also state organisations and non-profit organisations) that are most directly involved in the production of social meaning” (Ibid, p.12). He outlines the distinctive features of the cultural industries. They are risky business ventures that negotiate issues of creativity versus commerce and have high production costs and low reproduction costs. They produce ‘semi-public goods’ and therefore have a need to create scarcity. Mark Banks (2007, p.2) defines cultural industries as “those involved in the production of ‘aesthetic’ or ‘symbolic’ goods and services; that is, commodities whose core value is derived from their function as carriers of *meaning* in the form of images, symbols, signs and sounds.” Evangelists of the ‘new economy’ insist that cultural workers are free from dull corporate environments and that it is the future for all workers to be able to seek employment that is more flexible, more self-fulfilling and self-sufficient (see e.g. Banks, 2007, Davis and Scase, 2000, Florida, 2004).

Critical sociological accounts of creative labour however (e.g. Blair, 2000b, Gill, 2002, Gill and Pratt, 2008, McRobbie, 2002b, Ross, 2004, Ursell, 2000), have provided

analysis and understanding of the realities of life in the creative industries by offering critiques of neo-liberal claims to increased freedom and creativity at work, and have cut across the more celebratory and hopeful accounts promoted by governments such as Tony Blair's New Labour (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 1998, Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2001), for whom the cultural industries offer "a solution to systemic crises of deindustrialization" (Banks, 2007, p.1). These accounts have revealed trends and patterns of experience of working in the creative industries and the perpetuation of social inequalities which cannot be explained away in purely personal and individual terms and which mobilize debates around the need for change and an examination of the enduring powerlessness of the worker (e.g. Gill, 2002, Gill and Pratt, 2008, Kelan, 2009, McRobbie, 2002a, McRobbie, 2002b, McRobbie, 2009b).

Rosalind Gill convincingly demonstrates that the same celebrated features of working in the new cultural industries such as informality and flexibility "are the very mechanisms through which inequality is reproduced" (2002, p.86). Alan McKinley and Chris Smith (2009) argue that a labour process approach reveals the truth about working in real situations and challenges the claims and hype. These realities include experiences of cultural work as alienating, exploitative and precarious with often little or no pay, and high levels of stress and anxiety caused by the need to be constantly juggling more than one project or job at the same time as looking for future work through informal networking and self-promotion. Although positive aspects can also be experienced by individual workers (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2013), for this thesis my interest is less in the degree of personal fulfilment or reward for the work but the way that these attributes contribute to who actually gets to *do* the work.

Many commentators discuss the need for creative workers to have more autonomy and freedom than other workers for their creativity to flourish (see for example Bilton, 2007, Deuze, 2010, Hesmondhalgh, 2007). It is often used as an explanation as to why many

creative jobs are freelance: these workers cannot and do not want to be constricted by the ‘9 to 5’ office environment. From my own experience working with screenwriters, I contend that Richard Florida’s observation is more accurate:

...not all creative people want to be self-employed or job-hopping free agents. The one consistent quality I detect among creative people is that they seek opportunities to exercise their creativity. If they can find these opportunities by becoming free agents they will do so, and if they can find them by joining a firm and staying with it for a good while, they will do that. (Florida, 2004:28)

Employing screenwriters on a project by project basis allows employers to only pay for part of a screenwriter’s time, and puts the onus on the screenwriter to ensure they secure enough work to make a living wage, either as a screenwriter or by combining this with other forms of employment (such as teaching or other forms of writing). It also releases the employers from the burden of having to provide benefits, such as sick pay, holiday pay or maternity pay as the “risks and responsibilities are to be borne by the individual” (Gill and Pratt, 2008:3). It further allows employers to elicit free work from screenwriters in the form of hours worked and free rewrites as the screenwriter must prove themselves worthy to continue to the next (paid) stage in their contract. David Hesmondhalgh acknowledges:

Paradoxically, this freedom – which is in the end, a limited and provisional one – can then act as a form of control by maintaining the desirability of often scarce and poorly-paid jobs. (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p.6)

It is much more likely that the reason creative workers are given the ‘freedom’ of freelance employment is the uncertainty of the success of any creative product (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, McKinlay and Smith, 2009), and the high cost of production and product development in relation to the reproduction costs. It is no coincidence that the Hollywood Studios have kept hold of film distribution, whilst scaling back and outsourcing development and production (Christopherson, 2009, Hesmondhalgh, 2007). In the UK film industry, however, many of the potential employers of screenwriters, such as film producers, have working lives that reflect this description. Is it even reasonable to expect that they could be in a position to offer security and stability to the screenwriters they employ? In the next

section I will look at the film industry in more detail and then examine why careers in this precarious and competitive world remain so attractive despite the realities of the work.

1.2. Careers in the film industry

Susan Christopherson and Michael Storper have done extensive work looking at the changing context of creative careers in a post-Fordist society, where there has been a shift from vertically integrated firms to networks of small, specialized firms and freelancers. In particular they have documented the Hollywood film industry labour market and how changes within its structure have affected those working within it. They suggest that the large US studios have in recent years moved towards focusing their production efforts on expensive ‘blockbuster’ films, which Christopherson says are aimed at a young male audience, leaving independent firms and producers to make smaller and more niche films³. The resulting effect is that most film workers fit a “flexible specialization” model (Christopherson and Storper, 1988, Storper and Christopherson, 1987) – that is, they are employed on a freelance, project-by-project basis, applying their own particular professional specialization across a range of projects and often across different media. However, Christopherson (2008) has also shown that this trend towards high-risk, high-budget films has also led to a tendency to employ established, familiar and trustworthy creatives which has in practice meant that white men have closed the doors to their prestigious and lucrative networks and employment opportunities.

Christopherson and Storper’s research does not look closely at the working lives of any particular profession within the film industry or record differences between occupations that may happen to be predominantly freelance, for example. So whilst she is able to articulate

³ Christopherson includes films aimed at the women in this latter group, but it is not clear whether this is her interpretation or whether the studios themselves have articulated this although she does note that there are some countries where women are prohibited from public film screenings.

that “the social networking and social recruitment that precarious work relies upon has markedly intensified divisions on the basis of gender and ethnicity” (2008, p.89), Christopherson does not provide detail as to how this works in practice and there is no evidence of how this might particularly affect some professions, i.e. screenwriters, more than others. Creative labour research has highlighted the general preponderance of certain characteristics, such as long hours and ‘bulimic’ (Pratt, 2000) patterns of working extremely long hours and then not at all, poor pay, high levels of mobility, leisure and socializing as work, profound experiences of insecurity and anxiety about finding work, as well as noting the continuance of inequalities along the lines of age, gender, ethnicity and class. However, much of it does not examine how this is happening, or provide empirical evidence for these inequalities of outcome, with notable exceptions (see for example Christina Scharff (2015) on classical musicians, Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton (2012) on artists, Ros Gill (2002) and Mark Banks and Kate Milestone (2011) on new media workers and Ros Gill (2000) on radio DJs).

Susan Christopherson (2008) acknowledges that the structure of the film industry, with companies being formed for the duration of a project, and much of its workforce being freelance, means very little public data of the type available from firms in other industries is available. With the exception of the broadcasters in the UK, the big studios in the US and a handful of more successful companies, work in the film industry is mostly carried out in small or micro business (BFI, 2014) run by producers who may employ an assistant or development executive (often these roles are combined) on a full time contract and employ all other personnel, including screenwriters, as and when required on a project by project basis. “The individual free agent who works among many different subcontractors and across a variety of firms typifies the most common career pattern in the film industry” (Jones, 1996). In fact, many of the producers may consider themselves to be freelance workers, even though

they are the driving force in originating the projects, pulling the team together and financing a new venture through various private and public entities.

Single entrepreneurs or contracted freelancers, typically working in solitary ‘virtual’ or ‘network’ environments, may have little recourse to the plexus of support offered by managers, colleagues, the union or the occupational therapists. (Banks, 2007, p.58)

Producers will typically not be paid very much throughout the lengthy development period prior to pre-production and production and are likely to see the bulk of their salary released on principal photography – the first day of shooting. That is, if they have not had to defer it, or part of it, in order to secure more money for the production itself, an all too common practice.

Mark Deuze (2010) argues that the unpredictable nature of creative projects means that it is more economical for producers to employ workers on a flexible basis for the duration that they are required. He also highlights how this process relies heavily on networking and “know-who” as much as “know-how”, which has serious consequences for all women and people who are Black, Asian or minority ethnics (BAME), as I shall explore in more detail in Chapter Five. Project-based employment, such as the way in which the majority of film industry workers are employed on one film at a time, means that “freelance workers are increasingly having to rely on developing their own strategies for acquiring skills, finding work and making careers” (Randle and Culkin, 2009, p.98). As one film production labourer accurately articulates:

Doing the work is fun. Finding the work is the job.
(Margery, Script Supervisor, quoted in Randle and Culkin 2009, p.101)

From my own experience working in the UK film industry I am aware that UK government funded entities like the BFI and the UK Film Council and the broadcasters, particularly the BBC and Channel 4 often support producers with a nominal fee if they decide to fund the development of a project that the producer has brought to them. As part of that deal, producers are often able to secure finance to cover overhead costs and to engage

lawyers to negotiate contracts, but these are likely to be fixed amounts and don't always cover the real costs incurred. In addition, these development deals are hotly contested and only available to a small sector of those applying. The alternative is to raise private equity or rely on the profits from past successes – a very rare commodity indeed. More successful companies may be able to secure a more permanent and flexible development and overhead deal with a distributor or Hollywood studio in return for a first look at the projects they originate. In reality, this is only achieved after considerable success in the industry although it can allow the company a great deal of control over their fate and the opportunity to develop projects and relationships, which in turn can lead to greater success. In the UK Working Title's deal with Universal is perhaps the most envied and respected example⁴.

The work done by Helen Blair, Keith Randle, Neil Culkin and their associates (including Blair, 2000a, Blair, 2000b, Blair, 2003, Blair, 2009, Blair et al., 2001a, Blair et al., 2003, Blair et al., 2001b, Blair and Rainnie, 2000, Randle and Culkin, 2009, Randle et al., 2007) is extremely important as it provides the UK with some much needed information about our own film labour market, although it focuses almost exclusively on the production part of the supply chain. Helen Blair and Al Rainnie have criticized Susan Christopherson and Christopher Storper's (1988) account of Hollywood's move from mass production and vertical integration to flexible specialization and dual market segmentation as simplistic and offered the UK film industry's history of predominantly independent production and distribution companies as an alternative model (Blair and Rainnie, 2000). Blair has also shown how freelance production workers form 'semi-permanent working groups' (SPWG) (Blair, 2003) as a defense against the perils of a freelance career and often move from one job to another as a unit, with only the head of that department responsible for networking and

⁴ Working Title is the company behind such successful films as "Les Miserables", "Notting Hill", "Four Weddings and a Funeral" and "Frost v Nixon". See <http://www.imdb.com/company/co0057311/> for a full list of their credits.

securing work. Screenwriters, however, rarely have such an opportunity. They may be able to build on past success and secure a subsequent contract with a producer that they have worked with, a practice that Susan Rogers (2007) confirms is prevalent in the UK film industry, but this is not the same as a SPWG as the producer is likely to be working with several other writers on different projects at the same time and the screenwriter will usually need more than one employer in any given year. Ian Macdonald argues that the development process is instead better understood as a Screen Idea Work Group (SIWG), “a flexible constructed group organized around the development and production of a screen idea” (2010, abstract). Whilst this notion has some usefulness in allowing an examination of “the changing flux of power relationships...and the actual negotiation process involved in the working of that SIWG” (Ibid, p.49) it doesn’t entirely reflect the reality of the film labour market, where economic and social capital are very strong indicators of where power is located and upheld. Although Macdonald concedes that there is some hierarchy in the way that decisions are made and enforced, his argument that anyone can contribute with equal validity to the discussion of the SIWG, including friends, financiers, script readers and development executives, masks the reality of strongly hierarchical employment structures and a distribution of cultural capital in line with that hierarchy which means some opinions are definitely perceived as being more equal than others.

There is, however, a lack of research outside of the production process. Other sectors, including distribution, exhibition and development – the part where screenwriters work – are very different in their composition and working practices. The first three are more stable with many more employees than freelance jobs. According to Creative Skillset all 17,700 workers in the cinema exhibition sector are employees and 10 per cent of 1,200 jobs in film distribution are freelance (Creative Skillset, 2012, p28-33). As such these sectors tend to have better female representation. Women make up 46% of cinema exhibition workers and 51% in

film distribution (Ibid). This is reflected across other CCIs, as another Creative Skillset (2010b) report shows:

...representation is highest in sectors comprising larger employers in which more stable, permanent employment models are common, such as terrestrial television (48%), broadcast radio (47%), cinema exhibition (43%) and book publishing (61%).

Unfortunately, neither report further breaks down the statistics to reveal the types of jobs held by women or their representation in senior, creative or decision-making positions but it is clear that the stability of the job has an effect on gender equality and suggesting perhaps the compatibility with childcare and/or the decreased need to rely on networking. I will explore these aspects of creative work in more detail in later chapters.

The difficulty of having both a career and a family is highlighted in the Creative Skillset report, as well as the seemingly eternal injustice of lower financial reward for the same job. Since this report covers such a wide population, screenwriters have been assimilated into the ‘film production’ data. This is unfortunate as their working lives are very different to those in productions and they do not always face the same issues. The part of the film industry that seems both troubling *and* under-researched, is that part in which screenwriters work. With the exception of a handful of recent studies (Conor, 2014, Conor, 2015, Macdonald, 2010, Maras, 2009, Maras, 2011) there is very little available research that references screenwriting or the development part of the film industry. The majority of academic writing on screenwriting has focused on “craft tensions and resentments” (Maras, 2011), the practical considerations of writing a screenplay, and historical and biographical accounts. For a full and detailed overview of the field see Steven Maras’s article (2011) in which he argues that we need to go beyond these existing accounts and “get to the foundational questions of what form of practice is at stake, what ‘logic of practice’ is in play (Bourdieu 1990)” (p.282). Within the few examples given above there is little reference to

gender inequalities (with the exception of Conor, 2015), or how the film development labour market functions.

‘Development’ is the title given by the film industry to the creative processes that happen prior to financing and pre-production. The primary tasks in this period are: identifying and evaluating possible film projects, identifying writers to work on them and then writing and rewriting the screenplay. All of this is undertaken to get the project to a point where it is considered to be attractive by other personnel whose involvement is critical for the film to get made: directors, actors and financiers. Those who undertake this development work are most usually producers, who are predominantly self-employed, and development executives, who are sometimes employed by those producers with the available finances. They can be employed either full or part time and are usually on an annually renewable contract but often with few benefits and job security. Finally, of course, writers are employed on a project-by-project basis, sometimes only for a couple of drafts before being replaced. Very rarely are any of these individuals employed through a process of answering a job advertisement and successfully passing through an interview and formal assessment. If this happens it is usually in a government financed organization or a broadcaster who is accountable by legislation for equal opportunities. Pierre Bourdieu noted in his hugely influential work “Distinction” (1984, p.151) that recruitment in the ‘new professions’ associated with cultural production “is generally done by co-option, that is, on the basis of ‘connections’ and affinities of habitus, rather than formal qualifications’, a theme that I will be returning to throughout. Candace Jones uses the phrase “being socialized into the industry culture” to describe the process by which the film industry creates rules and behaviours which mark someone out as belonging (Jones, 1996). Only by finding an entry-level position and observing and assimilating the cultural norms from within is it possible to become accepted as part of the industry and therefore find ways to gain further employment.

The problem with this process is that it tends to favour those who are most like the people already employed. Newcomers must ‘fit in’ and prove that they can be trusted and are not going to require a lot of time and attention of very busy employers to train them up but instead can pick up the acceptable ways of performing and carrying out the tasks by themselves. In the process of doing this, anyone joining the film industry is likely to have to soak up its dominant discourses, for example about what audiences want to watch, what sales agents look for in a new film, and how best to identify good stories and talented people. Mark Banks argues that, for cultural firms and organizations, reproducing very similar products in the hope of replicating their success is an obvious strategy to deal with the unpredictable nature of the cultural market (Banks 2007). Who better to reproduce the same old thing, than the same old people, or at least someone very like them? In the next section I will consider why creative screenwriting work remains such an attractive career prospect, despite all of the challenges discussed in these first two sections.

1.3. Film labour supply and demand.

To succeed in a creative profession is now one of the most sought after goals in the labour market, particularly for the younger generations (Florida, 2004, McRobbie, 2002a, McRobbie, 2002b). Exact figures are hard to come by for screenwriters for the same reasons that this area is under-researched: the freelance, project-based, often unpaid nature of this work often undertaken in small and micro business. As I have already shown, data on screenwriters is conspicuous by its absence from Skillset’s many censuses and labour force digests. The UK Film Council’s annual report states that they had 1,720 applications in the year March 2009 to March 2010⁵ (UK Film Council, 2010). Although a few of these may have had the same writer attached it helps to give a sense of the number of film projects

⁵ This is the last year for which the UKFC had responsibility for distributing public money. The BFI does not release similar data on its applicants in its annual reports.

circulating in the UK at any one time. In addition the UKFC record 517 applications to the training body Skillset and 1,487 applications to the nine Regional Screen Agencies (Ibid, p.12). The UKFC's "Scoping Study into the lack of Women Screenwriters in the UK" also references the number of projects applying for development funding between 2004-05 (statistics from the UKFC's own database) which states that a total of 1173 of the total 1646 applications for that year were for script development (as opposed to production finance) (Sinclair et al., 2006, p.73). With average cinema visits at less than 3 times a year in the UK, whilst US films take over 70% per cent of the box office, it is clear that supply greatly outstrips demand (BFI, 2014).

Great riches of fame and fortune are apparently available to those who succeed in creative professions, although this perception has helped to obscure the reality of poor pay and conditions suffered by the majority of creative workers. But the desire to work creatively cannot be explained in financial terms alone. As Angela McRobbie observes:

In the cultural sector, those up to the age of approximately 40 now normatively self-exploit themselves by working hours no employer could legally enforce; they also do without all the protection afforded by employee status including sickness benefits; they are largely non-unionized; they are expected to take out private pension plans (which many cannot afford to do); they are unable to claim benefits for non-work time between jobs or 'projects' and they also cover their own workspace and equipment costs. (McRobbie, 2002b, p.101)

McRobbie references the apparent rags to riches stories of successful creative workers such as Chris Evans and J. K. Rowling. Implied in these legends is a discourse of opportunity. 'Anyone can do it' if they have the talent and drive. No specialist training or expensive equipment is required for careers like screenwriting. However, these broad-brush stroke myths hide the real truth that many are facing different barriers and consequent levels of success. What makes it so attractive as a career choice?

Richard Florida makes a convincing argument for how the developed world has moved from an industrial economy populated by "Organization Man" to one where:

People are still striving to be themselves, to find meaningful work, and to live in communities that let them validate their identities and live as complete people. (2002, p.xix)

He argues that the traditional forms of identity creation – e.g. family, church, neighbourhoods, companies – are no longer so relevant and “a fundamental characteristic of life today is that we strive to create our own identities...defining our identities along the varied dimensions of our creativity” (Ibid, p.7). David Hesmondhalgh believes that “the willingness of so many hundreds of thousands of people to take their place in the reservoir of cultural labour is the consequence of a commitment to doing creative work of which they can be proud” and “the glamour surrounding these worlds” (2007, p.207). To this we can probably add Mark Deuze’s (2010) reference to “making cool stuff”, McKinlay and Smith’s (2009) argument that “prestige, status and glamour are attached to many creative occupations in public perception” and Mark Bank’s “cultural work, it seems, is hardly like work at all.” (2007, p.4). In fact, creativity and financial success are often seen as poles apart. Hesmondhalgh traces this back to the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century:

The influences of the Romantic Movement and modernism have been profound and helped establish a widespread view in the West that symbolic creativity can only flourish if it is far away from commerce as possible. This view is embodied in prevailing myths about great artists. We often think of the greatest symbol creators as either being unrecognized, having little or no commercial success in their lifetime (such as Van Gogh) or being driven to despair by the superficiality of the commercial world they came to inhabit (Kurt Cobain for example). (2007, p.69)

McRobbie contends that “‘creativity/talent’ has recently come to represent the most desired of human qualities, expressive of, indeed synonymous with, an ‘inner self’ and hence a mark of uniqueness” (2002b, p.109). It seems that, in a developed and post-Fordist society, being a creative professional is often perceived as proof of your own worth and importance and perhaps helps to attain a degree of self-actualization⁶.

Bridget Conor (2014, p.1) claims that “screenwriting is often framed and represented as the least creative form of writing” Why then, is it so attractive as a potential career? Following a Marxist tradition, I contend that artistic work is “not so different from other

⁶ Florida quotes economist Paul Romer, for whom creativity is what distinguishes the human race from other species (Florida 2002, p.36)

kinds of labour” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p.4), but that the idea that ‘artists’ are in some way special and marked out from the rest of us is central to the way that screenwriters self-exploit and accept difficult conditions of employment. This is also central to the film industry’s justification of inequalities of access to screenwriting employment along gender, ethnic, class and other lines, on the basis that employment decisions are made solely on assessment of talent and experience (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). The fact that making a living wage by screenwriting is extremely difficult does not seem to deter a great many people⁷ but may have a significant role to play in understanding why some do not succeed or even try and why women, BAME and the working classes are significantly underrepresented in the profession. The tension between creativity and commerce may be one of the most important in understanding cultural and creative industries and those who work within them and yet “surprisingly little attention has been paid in sociology to the means of, and barriers to entry” in creative work (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p.71). Mark Banks conjectures that some cultural workers “may choose to prioritize the goals of their paymaster” (2001, p.9), but for how many is this really a ‘choice’?

The examination of screenwriting careers and the individuals who choose this profession cannot be understood simply from the position of a Marxist critique of exploited workers in the post-industrial ‘culture industries’. Creative workers such as screenwriters are not any under obligation or coercion to continue to work in such difficult conditions for little reward. A ‘neo-Foucauldian’ or ‘governmental’ lens can illuminate why individuals both choose the profession and are apparently complicit in their own subjection to the harsher realities of screenwriting work. Mark Banks tackles this subject so thoroughly and comprehensively in “The Politics of Cultural Work” (2007) that it is worth revisiting his

⁷ Hesmondhalgh references Miede in demonstrating that “creative labour within the cultural industries...is underpaid because of a permanent oversupply of artistic labour” (2007, p.71) as I have shown to be the case with screenwriters.

arguments in some detail here. Drawing on Foucault's (1977) ideas on discipline and self-government, Banks highlights how individuals become "the target of an array of discourses designed to demonstrate the social and personal gains to be obtained through dutiful compliance" (2007, p.45). Such discourses around screenwriting might include the personal fulfilment to be gained from a creative, flexible self-motivated form of employment and the unrecognized genius of many famous artists in their own lifetime.

Taken in a neo-liberal context that places the responsibility for their own destiny firmly on the shoulders of the individual Banks demonstrates this self-government can mean "workers view the enterprise culture that subjugates them as the only means through which meaningful and autonomous work can be obtained" (Ibid, p.42). This in turn leads to a society where "When individuals are forced to become their own enterprise, not only 'success' but 'failure' also become individualized problems demanding biographical solutions" (Ibid, p.43). So those yet to reap the rewards of their hard (creative) work are less likely to look for systemic and structural reasons for their failure, such as sexism or racism, but instead believe that "it is the individual who is not creative, pushy or talented enough, rather than an economic system that can only ever provide a limited number of winners (and substantially more losers)" (Ibid, p.62). Failure to secure work is therefore often a motivation to stay in the game for longer and implement Foucauldian notions of "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1988) to work harder at becoming a successful artist. This is something that Bridget Conor has demonstrated to be an accepted part of a working screenwriter's life (Conor, 2010, Conor, 2014). However, the lack of recourse to notions of structural and systemic inequality means that individuals may not understand what other factors might be playing a part in their success or failure. It is important to bear in mind, as Ursell has noted in her study of television workers, such emphasis on governmentality can "detract attention

from the elites whose economic and political decision-making continues demonstrably to shape the life experiences and possibilities of the many' (2000, p.163).

The 2009 Creative Skillset and Women in Film and Television report "Why her?" examined the factors which may have been important in the careers of successful women in film and television (Creative Skillset and WFTV, 2009). It highlights the belief amongst younger women that their industry is a meritocracy "it's more about whether you can do a good job rather than what sex you are" (Creative Skillset and WFTV, 2009: Industry Culture and Attitudes). Participants suggested the under-representation might be a lack of awareness on the behalf of young girls that they can do it, which actually indicates a lack of awareness amongst those that are working in the industry of the very real barriers that women might face. Richard Florida claims, "by papering over the causes of cultural and educational advantage, meritocracy may subtly perpetuate the very prejudices it claims to renounce." (2002, p.78). In Bourdieu's terms, the continued assertion of meritocracy in the film industry is a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) which reinforces the dominance of white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied creativity, in a way that is accepted and seen as both natural and legitimate by those whose interests are not served by the dominant tastes. I will explore this in greater depth in Chapter Three. Before that, the final two sections of this chapter will examine the demographics of current screenwriters of films and why it is also important to study those that employ them. This will begin the process of understanding the mechanisms of this symbolic violence in the field of the UK film industry.

1.4. Who writes films?

The title question of this section is clearly central to this thesis, but it is not simple to answer. Although it is not difficult to find data to indicate that there is substantial and continued underemployment of women and non-whites in the screenwriting profession, the

data is patchy and mainly Hollywood-facing. More importantly, however, I have found the work of Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton (2010, 2006, 2012) extremely useful in problematizing the idea that responsibility for a creative product can be attributed to one individual. Drawing on the work of Howard Becker (1982), Teresa Amabile (1983) and Vera John-Steiner (2000), as well as their own extensive empirical research, Taylor and Littleton “explore the complex discursive negotiation of the possibilities and constraints and conflicts around a creative identification” (2012, p.4) and illustrate how “creativity is fundamentally social” (Ibid, p.15). These are important ideas that I will come back to in more detail in Chapter Four. Their writing has been critical to my understanding of how judgments about creative ability and worth are subject to historical contexts, discursive constraints and individual identity work. When considering who writes films, it is important to remember Taylor and Littleton’s claim that “ownership of the output cannot appropriately be attributed to any particular individual, even though social conventions may dictate otherwise” (Ibid, p.15). This is a theme that I return to throughout my thesis but in order to provide the context for these discussions, the rest of this section will now focus on the data available about those special individuals who are identified (or have self-identified) as the screenwriters of films.

Martha M. Lauzen has taken on the responsibility for looking at the presence of women behind the 250 highest grossing films every year since 1998 and in doing so has built up a much needed body of evidence that not only are women not well represented in most key professions in the film industry, but that the situation is not changing (see for example Lauzen, 2002, Lauzen, 2008, Lauzen, 2014, Lauzen, 2015). Slight increases in the percentages of writers, directors, producers and other key roles in any year are all too often followed by slight decreases the following year and overall there is a sense that one or two successful women in any given year can alter the results but overall the industry is not ready

to make changes to the level of women's involvement in the key roles of feature film production. Table 1 below highlights some of Lauzen's data most pertinent to my research.

Table 1

| | 2014 | 2013 | 2009 | 2006 | 1998 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| % Female Writers | 11 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 13 |
| % Producers | 23 | 25 | 23 | 20 | 24 |
| % Female Executive Producers | 19 | 15 | 17 | 16 | 18 |
| % Female Directors | 7 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 9 |

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Employed in Key Behind-the-scene Roles taken from Martha M Lauzen's Celluloid Ceiling reports on the Top 250 Films between 1998 and 2014.

Between 1998 and 2014 the percentage of women writers has varied from just eight to thirteen per cent. It is also difficult to be optimistic about future prospects for women screenwriters whilst the numbers of main decision-makers employing writers and selecting which scripts to pursue to production remain equally stuck: only twenty to twenty five per cent of producers are women, fifteen to nineteen per cent of executive producers and just six or seven per cent of directors in most recent years. However, despite the enormous usefulness of her work Lauzen offers little interpretation of these figures, and does not present them with analysis or research to explore what lies behind the figures and the reasons for on-going inequality but leaves them to speak (volumes) for themselves.

In the mid 1980s The Writers Guild of America West "began systematically documenting disparities in earnings and employment" of its members (Bielby, 2009, p.249), providing a better overview of the working lives of all screenwriters, not just the most successful, but limited to those working in the US. The Guild has for many years advocated a need to address inequalities in the make up of the writing population for film and television in the US. Their 2007 report, entitled "Rethinking Business as Usual" stated that women writers had made gains in television, particularly in regard to average earnings, but that the situation for female writers of films remained static with little indication of any possible

change. BAME writers had dropped to only nine per cent of television work and remained unchanged in film employment at six per cent. The Guild argue that “business as usual has been wholly insufficient for addressing the Hollywood diversity problem” (Hunt, 2007, p.16). The 2009 report introduces an “all-too-familiar story about the challenges faced” and “little if any improvement” in the situation for both women and non-white writers (Hunt, 2009, p.12). Women accounted for just 24 per cent of WGAW members in 2007 and white males continue to out-earn all other writers. The most recent report concludes that “much work remains to be done on the industry diversity front, as women and minorities remain severely underrepresented among the ranks of Hollywood writers, particularly in film” (Hunt, 2014, p.13). It states that in the film sector women account for 15% and minority writers make up just 5% of the screenwriters employed. Writers aged 41 to 50 remain the most frequently employed, suggesting that the industry continues to rely on established talent and further decreases opportunities to diversify the talent pool.

Denise and William Bielby began the interpretation of data for the Writers Guild of America West in the 1980s and have continued to look extensively at the careers of women screenwriters, and women’s careers in a broader sociological context. Their research is also limited to those working in Hollywood and the United States. In addition, they do not have any empirical data from screenwriters or employers of screenwriters, but instead rely on “historical evidence” (Bielby, 2009: abstract) and the data from the Writers Guild of America West. They suggest that sex segregation, informal, arbitrary and therefore subjective employment processes with no accountability for equal opportunity, and the dominance of men in hiring and brokering roles as among the main causes for continued gender imbalance (Bielby, 2009, Bielby and Bielby, 2002) but also suggest that “cultural stereotypes are embodied in the industry’s product” (Bielby, 2009, p.248).

Denise and William Bielby's use of quantitative data built up over many years puts them in a very powerful position to challenge whether the situation is gradually improving for women screenwriters. Their conclusion: it's not. Women are "encountering an impenetrable glass ceiling" (Bielby and Bielby, 1996, p.256). Bielby and Bielby have been able to track the data for earnings to determine whether there is a trend towards the breaking down of gender barriers – what they call the model of declining disadvantage, or whether women continue to be discriminated against and never make up the gap in their earnings compared to their male peers (the continuous disadvantage model). Or worse still, that successful employment for men has more impact than for women and the gender gap actually increases as both gain experience (the cumulative disadvantage model). It is disappointingly predictable that they find the worse case scenario is true: cumulative disadvantage is apparent in the data and there is no evidence of declining disadvantage that might have indicated that the situation for women was improving (Bielby and Bielby, 1996).

The main sources of data about women in film and screenwriters in the UK are The British Film Institute (BFI), the now defunct UK Film Council (UKFC) with some contribution from Creative Skillset. In 2006 whilst I was employed at the UKFC, at that time the Government-backed strategic agency for film in Britain, I commissioned a scoping study to investigate the extent of the disparity of employment for women screenwriters in the UK. The resulting report shows worryingly similar findings to the Hollywood research. Women make up only 26 per cent of those writing for film in the UK, despite being 53 per cent of writers in the wider population, and are credited on less than 15 per cent of UK films made between 1999 and 2003 (Sinclair et al., 2006). The report also indicated that between 1990 and 2005 women were less than one in ten nominees for the British Academy of Film and Television

Awards (BAFTA Masterclass) for best original or adapted screenplay. Indeed they were only three of 43 winners, for just two adapted screenplays, and none of them were British⁸.

Within the scope of the study, we asked the researchers to look for possible reasons for the inequality by speaking to writers and industry professionals, both men and women. The results point towards problematic areas such as the process of getting known in the industry and accessing networks, the perception that women can only write ‘women’s films’ and erratic working patterns. However, they also reinforce other less helpful myths, such as the idea that women are less likely to write in commercial genres and are less able to take criticism of their work, things I knew from my own experience were not true for all female writers and indeed were true of many male writers. Although it is refreshing to hear from the screenwriters themselves, the study fails to acknowledge that all the interviewees are all working in the UK film industry and therefore may have, to a greater or lesser extent, already accepted and taken on the dominant discourses of the industry in order to succeed. Contradictory opinions and ideas are very clearly missing from the study as well as any kind of discourse analysis.

The scoping study was followed by another UKFC commission from Susan Rogers to establish who actually writes the films that get made that are certified as British by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport under Schedule 1 of the Films Act (1985) (Rogers, 2007). Looking at films released between 2004 and 2005, Rogers discovered that 98 per cent of the writers were white, 82.5 per cent were men, 66 per cent were over the age of 46 and 61 per cent were not British. By talking to 63 screenwriters credited on these film Rogers also discovered that half of them had a previous working relationship and nearly as many (42 per cent) had a previous *personal* relationship with the commission producer, director or

⁸ These winners were American Elaine May for *Primary Colours* (1998) and New Zealanders Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh for *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003), along with director Peter Jackson, to whom Fran Walsh is also married.

production company, backing the claim once again that it's 'who you know' that is most important in securing film work. With this in mind, I will now examine the role of those who employ screenwriters – David Hesmondhalgh's 'creative managers'.

1.5 Who employs screenwriters?

Many commentators have attempted to break down and classify the kind of jobs found in the CCIs, but for my purposes I would like to focus on just two types: the creative person (the screenwriter) and their employer/manager. I find David Hesmondhalgh's definitions the clearest and most descriptively accurate. He refers to "Primary Creative Personnel" such as musicians, screenwriters, and directors, and "Creative Managers" as two key components of the 'project team' (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p.64). There has been a great deal of critical exploration of the relationship between these two (see for example Banks, 2007, Bilton, 2007, Deuze, 2010, Hesmondhalgh, 2007, McKinlay and Smith, 2009). Bilton argues that "'management' and 'creativity' are often seen as contradictory terms" and that "this reflects a commonly held view that to be creative, it is necessary to be independent from the control of others" (Bilton, 2007, p.1). Even those critics and commentators who see through the propaganda around creative industries often do not question the individualized, 'gifted' (Banks, 2007, p.29) nature of creative work or critically examine the notion that the artist needs creative freedom and cannot be managed in a conventional way inside an organization (for example Banks, 2007, Bilton, 2007, Christopherson, 2008, Christopherson, 2009, Davis, 2010). But what type of person is in a position to want or expect this freedom from their employers? If a creative worker cannot rely on a regular income how can they establish a career for themselves without making substantial sacrifices in their personal life or being able to rely on the financial support of their family (Franks, 1999, Randle, 2010)? In fact, might not the argument for 'creative freedom' be little more than a discourse through which

individuals are persuaded to accept unfair working practices as a necessary part of creative work (Banks, 2007)?

Susan Christopherson shows how creative project work is frequently organized by a “key intermediary” (Christopherson, 2008) who plays a significant role negotiating between the artists and the market. This is very similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s term ‘cultural intermediaries’, which is slightly less concretely defined and can refer to the critics of art and culture such as journalists who review artistic endeavours and offer their opinion to help audiences decide which exhibitions, productions and performances they would like to spend time and money going to see. Keith Negus suggests that Bourdieu’s ‘cultural intermediaries’ can also be viewed as closer to Christopherson’s term - occupying a position between artist and audience and “operating across and exerting influence within a nexus of social relationships” (Negus, 2002, p.119). Key intermediaries play a crucial role in managing and coordinating creative people (Davis and Scase, 2000) in many cultural industries. For example, Negus examines the role of A&R directors in the music industry as “the point at which cultural judgements are converted into business decisions and vice versa” ((Negus, 1998) quoted in Davis and Scase (2000, p.67)). In the film industry this role is taken up by that of the film producer. Vincent Porter argues that understanding a producer’s art

...lies in appreciating his or her ability to manipulate creatively the complex and interlocking relationship between four key factors: an understanding of public taste – of what subjects and genres could attract a broad audience; the ability to obtain adequate production finance; the understanding of who to use in the key creative roles and on what terms; and the effectiveness of her or his overall control of the production process. (Curran and Porter, 1983, p.179-180)

A film producer will attempt to increase the value of a new film project for potential finance sources and distributors by employing key creatives with a demonstrable track record, which makes it difficult to diversify the existing talent pool with regards to writers (and directors). Nevertheless new ‘talent’ emerges into the pool each year, so this doesn’t explain why the gender (and other) inequalities persist. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Six, senior and influential film producers are, like Negus’s key decision makers in the music industry,

“drawn from a very particular class background and habitus” (2002, p.120), which informs their decision-making:

...what often appear to be fundamentally economic or commercial decisions (which artists to sign/how much to invest in them/how to market them) are based on a series of historically specific cultural values, beliefs and prejudices. (Ibid, 2002, p.116)

In addition, and of vital importance for my own research, Susan Christopherson describes how the producer is “critical to interpreting how incentives move from conglomerate distributor to the workforce” (Christopherson, 2008, p. 80), i.e. the producer makes decisions about who to hire based on the demands and tastes of the distributors and the audience. Early on this project, I wished to examine whether this is a critical point at which discriminatory ideologies are reawakened and reinforced. If the audience is imagined as male, for example, as Christopherson asserts, does the distribution sector demand of the producer that the product be designed for a male viewer and does this lead to a favouring of male writers and directors who demonstrate the corresponding tastes and indeed, in Bourdieusian terms, the right habitus, or ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)?

Mark Deuze describes the “hourglass structure” (2010, p.1) of creative industries where a handful of companies interact with many individual creatives and also a large audience. It is these companies, these managers, these intermediaries who play a crucial role in deciding which of the creatives work is allowed through to address the audience. Deuze argues, “more attention needs to be given to understanding professional values, idiosyncrasies of talent and people management issues like hiring and retention policies” (Ibid, p.2). In “The Politics of Cultural Work” (2007) Mark Banks devotes a chapter to ‘the new creative manager’ and asserts that “managers play an important role in defining, managing and controlling creativity” (Ibid, p.73). Although he doesn’t specifically examine the role they play in defining *who* is thought of as creative he observes that:

Managers routinely defined creative workers as capricious and unpredictable, and often felt unable to trust them to deliver projects in line with the firm’s business objective or clients’ requirements. (Banks, 2007, p.75)

Producers, as creative managers, key intermediaries and indeed gatekeepers to finance and production may play a key role in upholding gender disparities. This is due to their lack of trust of the creative worker, created in no small part by their need to uphold the myths of the artist as gifted and special as already discussed, in order to justify the conditions under which screenwriters are employed.

1.6. Conclusion

The statistics are published year after year. The film industry employs disproportionately low numbers of women in key creative roles, including as screenwriters, and little is changing. The work done by screenwriters is often ‘invisible’ to return to McRobbie (2002b) – hidden away from public eyes and the theatre of production, the majority of their work only ever read by a handful of people and their authorship often attributed to others – rewriters and actors, but most of all directors. The women who do this work are even more invisible, far less likely than men to see their words make it to the screen. Those who are working are in the minority and identifying those who might be missing is challenging (more on this in Chapter Three). I have argued that creative careers such as screenwriting remain attractive despite the poor pay and conditions faced by many and the continued inequality of opportunity along class, race and gender lines. Work in the film industry offers an exemplary case study for post-Fordist labor and therefore is an excellent place to start critically examining how inequality in creative careers is upheld, in particular by interrogating the role of key intermediaries or creative managers in selecting who is considered creative and talented enough. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1996, p.167) “the principal obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of the value of cultural goods” is the “charismatic ideology of ‘creation’”. Charismatic ideology “directs the gaze towards the apparent producer and prevents us from asking who has created this “creator” and the magic

power of transubstantiation with which the “creator” is endowed” (Ibid). In my research I consider how the ‘creator’ is conceived and acknowledged and by whom, and who is simultaneously found lacking by the very same judgments. Before that, the next chapter will look at how gender is theorized, and look at how Bourdieu’s work can be helpfully applied to understanding gender inequality in creative work.

2. GENDER AND THE CREATIVE WORKPLACE

So it's like four men which is slightly predictable in itself, but because it's four men the first week all the ideas were hookers and strippers, hookers and strippers, and I was literally screaming at them by the end 'there are no hookers and strippers in this thing!' not because I'm banging the table for some feminist agenda, but because it's corny, we've seen it before. Until the point where they were going 'what about fat hookers?' (Ed, screenwriter)

In 2007, Warner Brothers' President of feature film production "allegedly announced a moratorium on female leads" (Shoard, 2008, p.1022) due to their failure to make money. This was apparently based on the losses from "The Brave One" (starring Jodie Foster) (Jordan, 2007) and "The Reaping" (starring Hilary Swank) (Hopkins, 2007). It is perhaps worth noting that both films were written and directed by men. In 2012, however, "The Hunger Games" (Ross, 2012), a female-written and female-starring action science fiction film became a headline-grabbing, record-breaking surprise hit in cinemas worldwide (Barnes, 2012, McClintock, 2012, Palmeri, 2012, Subers, 2012, Sullivan, 2012, Waters, 2012). It is the fastest selling non-sequel ever, third biggest opening weekend ever and the first film to stay at the top of the box office for four weeks since "Avatar" (Cameron, 2009) – the most successful film ever made (boxoffice.com, 2012). It was a surprise because it wasn't made by one of the big studios, but by the smaller Lionsgate, previously best known for its "Saw" horror franchise (Wan, 2004).

The suggestion is that the bigger studios didn't expect "The Hunger Games" to make much money. Since it is based on a best-selling novel (Collins, 2008) with over 23 million copies in print before the film release (Lewis, 2012), the rights could have been an attractive prospect, but it was clearly not thought to be a worthwhile investment. This is very likely to have been because it has a female in the lead role (McClintock, 2012) and therefore was not expected to do well at the box office (despite repeated comparisons to the "Twilight" Saga (Hardwicke, 2008), the third of which grossed just over US\$300 million (Sullivan, 2012), and

the first of which was the previous film to stay at the number one spot for three weeks in a row since “Avatar”, until “The Hunger Games” came along.

Journalists repeatedly referred to the gender of the audience when reporting “The Hunger Games” success, although some did make the point to film financiers that women do go to see films (Hare, 2009, Shoard, 2008) and that audiences will watch female action heroes (Palmeri, 2012), despite what Hollywood seems to believe. Time after time, critical and box office success around female talent and female audiences has been dismissed as a fluke, an exception, unexplainable (e.g. “Mamma Mia!” (Lloyd, 2008) – the fastest selling ever DVD in the UK but overlooked at the BAFTAs, “Bridget Jones’s Diary” (Maguire, 2001) – despite huge box office success, the director took seven years to make another film, “Sex in the City” (King, 2008) – whose success was attributed to loyalty to the TV brand or “Bridesmaids” (Feig, 2011), another “surprise hit” (Palmeri, 2012)). Even “The Hunger Games” with its female novelist, female screenwriter, female protagonist and 61% female audience (Palmeri, 2012), has its success attributed to the fact that it attracted men too (McClintock, 2012, Sullivan, 2012), as though the men are the real key to ‘a cultural juggernaut’ (Barnes, 2012). Another line of reasoning was that “The Hunger Games” only held onto the number one position because “male moviegoers were split between the three new releases this weekend, which allowed the female-skewing Hunger Games to take the top spot” (Subers, 2012).

There is still a widespread belief within the film industry that men are the primary and majority viewers of feature films (Hare, 2009) despite increasing amounts of evidence to the contrary (Hare, 2009, Sinclair et al., 2006). As I have already highlighted, it is clear that the film workforce is overwhelmingly male year after year (Lauzen, 2010, Lauzen, 2011, Rogers, 2007, Sinclair et al., 2006, Creative Skillset, 2010b, Creative Skillset and UK Film Council, 2008). It is also true that the majority of main characters (Smith et al., 2015) and, hand-in-

hand with that, the biggest stars, are male (Ulmer, 2009). Are female practitioners and audiences being excluded or are they just not as interested? Are they uninterested *because* they are being excluded and are not being adequately represented?

In film labour markets men and women certainly appear to be regarded as very different. Patterns of employment often follow gender stereotypes, a segregation which has been shown to uphold inequality (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015). Hair and Make Up departments, for example, are dominated by women, whilst jobs that use technical machinery such as camera operators are predominantly male workforces (Creative Skillset, 2010b). In this chapter I will outline how gender has been theorized as socially constructed and the feminist theories that have informed my work. I examine how the effects of gender socialization impact on women as creative workers and, with reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, how this might be better understood and challenged. Drawing in particular on an article by Toril Moi: “Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of culture” (Moi, 1991), I consider how gender is constructed as part of an individual’s habitus, with manifest consequences in the world of work. For example, the labour women in general are expected to perform on their own physical appearance (see Gill, 2007a) may make them more disposed than men to a career in film and television Hair and Make Up departments, and also gives them the appropriate habitus and superior capital to be recognized as skilled in that particular field. This may indicate that women have a fair chance of employment in film and other CCIs, but hierarchies of reward and recognition within creative professions often mean women are found in roles that have less status. So that, whilst it is possible to claim that women make up half the film workforce (Creative Skillset, 2012, p.31-32), in reality they are still scarce in senior and key creative roles and they have a higher representation in cleaning (63%), HR (73%) and administration (80%) (Ibid, p.33). Even in

‘above-the-line’⁹ positions women’s status is often lower than men’s. Costume Designers, for example, who are predominantly female, are considered to be less critical to the creative process of making a film than cinematographers and less creative than fashion designers: the latter two professions being of course predominantly male (Banks, 2009).

2.1. What is a woman?

It feels slightly glib that you take what was a male role and just put a female lead into it. I’m never quite sure that it’s entirely successful.
(Frank, employer)

In the analysis of my research data, I found feminist theories of gender as socially constructed to be extremely helpful in enabling me to critique the discourses around women in the film industry. This section summarizes the arguments of those that I found most useful. These theories draw our attention to the artificial nature of gender and deconstruct the signifiers of gender to discover whose interests are served by the construction. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir claimed that the category of woman is a cultural accomplishment:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.295)

Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick in their thorough examination of “Language and Sexuality” also argue that to be a woman is something that has to be learned, and that it is not a fixed set of rules, but something that changes according to when and where you are:

To give a couple of examples (they are trivial, but a great deal of everyday gendered behaviour is trivial): Western women have to learn not to sit with their legs apart and to button their coats the opposite way from their brothers. On the other hand, most no longer have to learn to ride side-saddle or lace a corset. (2003, p.3)

Perhaps most influentially, in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler argues that feminism has made a mistake by trying to assert that ‘women’ are a homogenous and united

⁹ Industry terms ‘above’ and ‘below’ ‘the line’ refer to production budgets. Key personnel are listed above an actual line on the budget. They are separated because they are considered to have high status and experience and therefore are paid an individually negotiated rate, whereas anyone listed below is subject to standard and fixed remuneration.

group with common characteristics and interests. She argues that such an approach unwittingly reinforces a binary view of gender relations. Feminism therefore risks closing down the options available for a person choosing their own identity.

For Butler gender is performative and should be seen as a fluid variable that shifts and changes in different contexts, “performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (1990, p.25), although she is clear that this does not mean it is not ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ (p.43). Butler suggests that certain cultural configurations of gender have come to seem natural in our culture through perpetual reproduction in performance, so that gender can appear to be who you are, rather than what you do. For Butler, gender performativity is compulsory and it is difficult to escape naturalized constructs of sex and gender as daily iterable discursive practice (Butler, 1993). Importantly for her there is no fixed corresponding sex as a “bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed” (Ibid, p.2) as there is for de Beauvoir. Butler argues that there is no definitive always present indicator of sex, whether genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, facial hair, internal body parts or muscle structure and to attribute gender as a construction arising from a already existing sex is to fall back into the framework that ‘biology is destiny’. She dismisses the idea that there is any identity or agency that exists outside or prior to discourse.

Butler seeks to disrupt the perception that sex causes gender that in turn causes desire and in revealing the constructed nature of all these elements in a heterosexual hegemony, she thereby illuminates the ways that inequalities are created in society. She argues that heterosexuality is a political institution that maintains the gender hierarchy that subordinates women and that “the sex/gender and nature/culture dualisms [are] constructed and naturalized in and through one another” (1990, p.48). She questions whether “the description of bodies in terms of binary sex is adequate”, leading as it does to the idea that “femaleness ought to be understood as the presence or absence of maleness” (Ibid, p.139). Following Butler, Cameron

and Kulick are quick to articulate the difference between ‘performativity’ and ‘performance’: “most of us, most of the time, are not aware of performing anything in this highly self-conscious way. What we are doing, however, is materializing gender/sexual identity/desire by repeating, consciously or not, the acts that conventionally signify for example ‘femininity’ or ‘butchness’ or ‘flirting’ (2003, p.150). Women who choose to act outside the accepted framework of ‘normal’ female behaviours are often judged harshly, seen as overly aggressive, labelled as “bossy”, a “bitch” or a “diva”. Thus the ‘compulsoriness’ of gender performance is policed and reinforced.

Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) “define gender as something people *do*, an emergent feature of social settings, rather than an identity people *have*, a property of individuals” (Hall, 1993, p.331), or in their own words: “a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures”” (1987, p.125). Whilst they emerge from different disciplines - Butler’s work is rooted in speech act theory, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, but West and Zimmerman are “distinctively sociological” (Ibid, p.126) - they come to some strikingly similar conclusions (Moloney and Fenstermaker, 2002). They both present gender as an activity. West and Zimmerman present an “understanding of gender as an accomplishment; an emergent feature of social situations that is both an outcome of and a rationale for the most fundamental division of society” (1987, p129). Like Butler, they are also critical of making a distinction between sex and gender. West and Zimmerman believe that “society is partitioned by “essential” differences between women and men and placement in a sex category is both relevant and enforced” meaning that “doing gender is unavoidable” (Ibid, p.137). Both theories have been criticized for focusing on the small details of personal interaction and paying less attention to the part played by social structure and institutions in creating gender divisions and identities. West and Zimmerman perhaps more successfully

overcome these criticisms, as they argue that “to ‘do’ gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behaviour *at the risk of assessment*” and that assessment is by individuals, institutions and society (Ibid, p.137).

Building on their own theories, Don Zimmerman and Candace West joined with Sarah Fenstermaker to argue that separating the work done in between individuals and that done by society and institutions is misleading because the two are produced simultaneously. In “Doing Difference” they also argue that “gender cannot be coherently isolated from race and class” (Fenstermaker et al., 2002, p.59) and that people experience them simultaneously too. They seek to demonstrate that there is something generalizable about the way in which ‘differences’ between people are produced in interaction. A black woman facing difficulties establishing a screenwriting career, for example, may not be able to attribute those difficulties to either her gender or her race exclusively, or notice any discrimination as to one aspect of her person rather than another.

Their theory has been criticized for failing to take sufficient account of institutional and societal influences on gender inequalities, or of the historical and situational position in which individual interactions take place (see for example Collins, 2002, Maldonado, 2002, Takagi, 2002, Weber, 2002). In addition, they have been accused of reducing systems that produce real inequalities of power to ‘difference’ voluntarily acted out by those who are the subject of the inequalities (Collins, 2002). By focusing on how differences are upheld and the way in which an individual enacts “conduct that repeats and thus supports systems of power” (Winnat, 2002, p.94), potentially colluding in their own subordination, they are reproached for “neglecting countervailing processes of resistance, challenge, conflict and change” (Thorne, 2002, p.88). Butler criticizes “the model of power that would set up racism and homophobia and misogyny as parallel or analogical relations” (1993, p.18) and looks instead for ways to “trouble the gender categories that support gender hierarchy and compulsory

heterosexuality” (1990, p.x). West and Fenstermaker (2002) respond by reiterating that their concept of ‘the accountability’ of any individual is to prevailing cultural conceptions *and* to those that depart or seek to challenge those conceptions, and is both interactional and institutional in character. However, they do admit they “have not fully articulated how the accomplishment of gender, race and class actually link the realms of institutional and face-to-face interaction” (Ibid, p.100) and call for empirical research to help achieve this. Similarly, critics of Butler’s theories have argued that her theoretical, language-based approach has little practical use in solving actual injustices and inequalities in the real world (Nussbaum, 1999, Speer, 2005) as it doesn’t show how ‘doing gender’ happens in real situations (Kelan, 2009).

My research makes a contribution to the growing body of empirical feminist research that seeks to reveal the effects of the social construction of gender in the real world (see for example, Adkins, 1995, Kelan, 2009, Scharff, 2015). In analyzing my interview data I found Butler’s writing incredibly inspiring for the way she prods at seemingly unassailable assumptions about gender until they collapse. I also found her arguments on the role of heteronormativity in sustaining gender difference particularly useful in dissecting the way that women in film are often associated with stories about the pursuit of romantic love. However, I am drawn to West and Zimmerman’s theories precisely because they place an emphasis on the upholding and reifying of gendered power as it is useful in accounting for the way that change seems to be hard to achieve, even when the will is there. This is something I will take up in my discussion of Pierre Bourdieu’s theories in the next section.

2.2. Thinking about gender with Bourdieu

Everyone’s going ‘there must be a solution!’ This initiative or that initiative. And none of those initiatives work because what matters is an existential thing about why don’t we value those stories? (Jo, employer)

Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of the habitus and embodied capital (1977, 1986) are particularly useful in accounting for why men might be perceived to have more worthwhile

ideas and more valuable stories than women. He offers a model of social strata of power operating through the accumulation of various forms of capital, which in turn have different values in particular social 'fields'. Economic capital, which takes the form of money, or possessions that can be converted into money, can be understood as an individual's financial assets. Social capital is the actual and potential value of a person's connections with others. It is accumulated through birth, relationships with others and membership of certain groups and clubs, all of which are of course related to each other. Cultural capital is found in the acquiring of cultural goods and in the sum of a person's embodied competencies and institutionalized knowledges such as educational qualifications and familiarity with various art forms. All of these capitals can function as symbolic capital because of their ability to give the individual a certain status or recognition within a particular field.

A person's capital, and the resulting dispositions, skills and tastes (see Chapter Seven) form their capacities for action within a particular field. They are predisposed to act in certain ways due to their 'habitus' – the embodied and subconscious capacities of a person's socialized dispositions:

Different conditions of existence produce different habitus. (Bourdieu, 1984, p.166)

For Bourdieu, each field is a structured system of social positions within which takes place a competitive game to get power and control the legitimacy of other participants. Without the right capital, as embodied and also recognized in the habitus, it may be hard for an individual to take part, let alone dominate in a field. Individuals surround themselves with manifestations of their habitus – through their appearance, property, interests and tastes. Bourdieu claims that these classificatory schemes act as "countless pieces of information a person consciously or unconsciously imparts endlessly" (Ibid, p.169) and through which people are able to identify those most like themselves.

The spontaneous decoding of one habitus by another is the basis of the immediate affinities which orient social encounters, discouraging socially discordant relationships. (Ibid, p.239)

In the film industry, as I shall explore in more detail in later chapters, schooling, upbringing, contacts and indeed gender are all important signifiers of belonging (or not belonging) in the field. As I shall demonstrate, the habitus offers a way to account for why some individuals are more welcome, and feel more comfortable, in the film industry than others. Bourdieu makes these processes visible and opens their accepted validity to challenge:

What is learnt through immersion in a world in which legitimate culture is as natural as the air one breathes is a sense of the legitimate choice so sure of itself that it convinces by the sheer manner of the performance, like a successful bluff. (Ibid, p.91)

Those with the dominant habitus in a field are thus both the holders of symbolic capital and the “wielders of symbolic power and thus of symbolic violence” (Moi, 1991, p.1022). They are able to make their views and tastes appear to have more value and to marginalize the participation of others:

Subordinated groups are ‘marked’ thus we talk about ‘women writers’ but not ‘men writers’, ‘Black politicians’ but not ‘white politicians’, ‘gay TV personalities’ but not ‘straight TV personalities’. Dominant groups, on the other hand, are ‘unmarked’: to be white/male/straight is the default standard for being human. (Cameron and Kulick, 2003, p.153)

Bourdieu offers a particularly helpful approach to understanding how the dynamic of gendered socialization can result in symbolic violence against women (“aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56)), despite his apparent lack of attention to gender in the majority of his work, which predominantly focuses on class differences and inequality. Toril Moi, who thanks Bourdieu himself for helping her develop “a productive feminist perspective on his theories”, (1991, p.1043) offers a way to use Bourdieu to “reconceptualise gender as a social category” (Ibid, p.1019).

Like the feminist theorists in the previous section, Bourdieu believes gender is socially constructed, and that viewing it as essential or biological is simply a way to present gender divisions as unquestionable (Bourdieu, 2001). Using Bourdieu’s theories, Moi outlines how “to produce a gender habitus requires an extremely elaborate social process” (1991, p.1030) and “even such basic activities as teaching children how to move, dress and

eat are thoroughly political, in that they impose on them an unspoken understanding of legitimate ways to (re)present their body to themselves and others” (Ibid, p.1030). She argues that gender has much in common with Bourdieu’s concept of class: it is perceived as natural and self-evident, it is historically reproduced, embodied and makes an individual open to judgment. Bourdieu never looks at class as a field in its own right, but sees it as part of the “whole social field” and Moi argues that gender should be similarly considered, with the added advantage of facilitating an intersectional framework where there is no “fixed and unchangeable hierarchy” (Ibid, p.1035) between the effects of gender and class on a person’s habitus and life experiences.

Bourdieu’s theories are useful to explain why and how women’s voices might be excluded from a field like the film industry:

“...any field is necessarily structured by a series of unspoken and unspeakable rules for what can legitimately be said – or perceived within the field. In this sense, Bourdieu writes, the whole field functions as a form of censorship (see *Questions de sociologie*, 138-42).” (Moi, 1991, p.1022)

However, despite his efforts to conceptualize bodily dispositions as also shaping the fields in which they operate, critics of Bourdieu have found his theories less helpful in accounting for the possibility of change (Lovell, 2000). As I argued in the last section, for me this is one of the strengths of Bourdieu’s work. In my nine years investigating the lack of women screenwriters I have seen almost no change in the position of women in film, as Martha Lauzen’s annual reports testify. Bev Skeggs’s interviews with working class women demonstrated how even the smallest amounts of capital can be used by possessors to leverage their position as much as possible, but the same individuals are ultimately constrained by social structures (Skeggs, 1997). Women have been given the vote, the right to work, access to contraception, legal protection from spousal violence, and yet fundamentally we are still treated as different, assigned gendered roles, not taken seriously as leaders or as having ‘universal’ experiences. As the position of women in film has increasingly been given a spotlight on the public discursive stage (see the next section in this chapter), my concerns for

female screenwriters have become less about working out where they are and more about why aren't things changing. The next section describes the work of feminist theories in understanding how women continue to face inequalities despite the gains of first and second wave feminism and the recent upsurge of interest in gender inequality in international film industries.

2.3. Post-feminism and beyond

I think it's up to women. I think it's up to them to get off their arses and make a film rather than go 'oh my god, woe is me, it's not fair, it's all really prejudiced, we should have this opportunity'. Why not work your butt off, get good, do what you need to do to get good? (Pippa, employer)

In my analysis I draw on Rosalind Gill, Angela McRobbie and Christina Scharff (Gill, 2007a, Gill and Scharff, 2011, McRobbie, 2009b, McRobbie, 2009a, Scharff, 2012) to inform my comprehension of gender in a 'post-feminist' world (Gill, 2007a). Their work provides a feminist perspective on "a grammar of individualism" (Gill, 2007a, p.153) found in the talk of my research participants, and helps understand why many of them found it hard to even recognize inequalities. Neoliberal discourses, which position the modern British woman as self-responsible (Scharff, 2012), do not take into account wider structural inequalities and exclusions that might help explain why some people have more success than others.

Angela McRobbie has argued that women have actually been disempowered by discourses of individual choice and consumer freedom in which feminism is seen as old-fashioned and no longer relevant (McRobbie, 2009a). Christina Scharff's interviews with young women in the UK and Germany revealed a view of themselves as "able managers of their own lives" (2012, p.123). They disliked the idea of feminism, fearing that it consigns women to be seen as whining victims – a position that does not sit well with their view of themselves as agentic neoliberal subjects. Ros Gill claims that presenting women as autonomous agents in an age of equality prevents further challenges to power imbalances and

she notes the “striking...degree of fit between the autonomous postfeminist subject and the psychological subject demanded by neoliberalism” (2007, p.154).

The idea that girls and women ‘choose’ their subject positions makes it harder to critique them or recognize the forces at work in producing inequalities. As a consequence girls and women who feel less affinity to a ‘feminist’ position are often unaware that available - gendered - subject positions might be challenged and replaced with a different way of experiencing the world. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that women may be reluctant to be singled out for equality schemes and hope instead to be considered on the basis of their skills, talent and experience, unaware of how their gender might count against them:

I don’t want to get in on the equal opportunities ticket. Forget the female, take that away from my job title, I’m a writer and I expect to be treated the same. I will not accept it. (Screenwriter, quoted in Sinclair et al., 2006, p.79)

Gill criticizes John Gray, whose writing on the differences between men and women as so extreme they might as well be from different planets (Venus and Mars) (Gray, 2004), caught the popular imagination and helped re-establish ground that the second wave feminists had begun to destroy in the 1970s when the similarities between men and women were emphasized instead of the differences. She argues that attempts to criticize this new ‘post-feminist’ wave of culture - where feminism is acknowledged and simultaneously dismissed as irrelevant, and sexism is once again allowed in a ‘knowing’ environment - is often counter-attacked with “references to the critic’s presumed ugliness, stupidity or membership of the ‘feminist thought police’ (Gill, 2007a, p.160). McRobbie (2009a) adds that women must withhold critique of sexism in order to be seen as sophisticated and modern, and Scharff demonstrates that the popular view of feminists as “humourless, man-hating and anti-pleasure” (2012, p.119) is one with which few women want to be associated.

The last few years, however, have seen a growth in awareness of continued forms of gender inequality and a renewed role for feminism. In the film industry there has been an

unprecedented surge of interest in the subject, and every week it seems more high profile figures are apparently feeling moved and able to speak out about injustices and lack of opportunity for women (Berger, 2015b, Horn et al., 2015). Led by key advocates like Melissa Silverstein who runs the “Women and Hollywood” blog (Silverstein, 2011) and Geena Davis’s Institute for Gender in Media (Smith and Cook, 2008), and no doubt aided by the attraction of being able to run stories about famous and glamorous people, the wider media has taken up the story (Thompson, 2015, O’Connor, 2015). For the first time in many years, the discussion of systemic and structural inequalities has become a possibility (Mendelson, 2015).

Christina Scharff (2012) has traced the role in Germany of several books that triggered a renewed interest in gender inequalities, and noted the apparent desire for the authors to distance themselves from ‘old’ feminism. She demonstrates the privileged, heteronormative and neoliberal position that is displayed by the authors of these texts and the similarities with the discourses of her interviewees who repudiated feminism outright. This is certainly not an issue confined to Germany, as can be witnessed by actress Patricia Arquette who accidentally revealed her elitist view of feminist issues as being about straight white women, after she made a speech calling for wage equality at the Academy Awards (Nianias, 2015). Indeed, in Rachel Thompson’s article for ‘The Telegraph’, which asks the same question as this thesis, Kate Kinninmont, the CEO of Women in Film and Television UK is quoted as saying “we at Women in Film and Television don’t believe in whinging” (Thompson, 2015), an echo of Scharff’s observation of the German ‘alpha-girls’ refusal to complain (2012, p.118). Neoliberalism seems to have a strong hold over a potential new wave of feminists and might still derail attempts to truly understand and change inequalities if women still do not feel able to get angry (Gill, 2011). In the final section of this chapter I will examine the relationship between the social construction of gender and feature film

production, and how the continued assumption of difference produces obstacles for creative women.

2.4. Creating difference, creating creatives

Over the years having daughters [I] thought I don't really like what's out there for women and I get increasingly less tolerant of going to see blockbusters where the women are really great actresses but get side-lined into really shitty parts, basically they run around screaming until the guy has finished what he's doing. (Emily, screenwriter)

As children, boys and girls are socialized to behave according to their gender (Cameron and Kulick, 2003, McRobbie, 2009b, Wajcman, 1991) and come to have different expectations of their life. According to Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick:

'Normal' development for women is equated with movement through a set of life stages defined largely in terms of heterosexuality (dating, one or more serious 'steady relationships, marriage or cohabitation, having and bringing up children). This trajectory is not simply left to happen 'naturally', even though it is always portrayed as a natural phenomenon. (2003, p.44)

Images and stories disseminated through the various media have become a huge part of this process. A cycle is set up by which the images available to young girls of women in the world are constricted to a narrow set of roles, most commonly revolving around the pursuit and securing of heterosexual love as the route to happiness (Smith and Cook, 2008). Since these are the roles and stories available for girls and women to identify with, it influences what they are interested in, and how they see themselves and their place in the world. Then, because girls and women are interested in these stories, the media exploit that and give them more. So the cycle continues.

Boys are socialized towards the world of work, and away from more domestic roles, in preparation to become the main breadwinner (Kelan, 2008). Cameron and Kulick point out that men have historically been paid more than women for this reason, and this pattern still persists (Conditions of Work and Equality Department, 2015) as men are assumed to be responsible for the family and therefore their wage is essential, whereas women at work are often still seen as bringing in 'additional', non-essential money into the family (Cameron and

Kulick, 2003). Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker ask some very pertinent questions about why people “persist in socialization practices that restrict the activities of their children, and why would girls and women internalize expectations that disadvantage them in relation to power, freedom and other resources?” (West and Fenstermaker, 2002, p.53) Why do so few people choose to buck the trend, or succeed where others have failed? Their simple answer – “because they cannot avoid it”.

Parents socialize their children in accord with their own internalized expectations, because they were socialized as children in accord with their parents internalized expectations, etc. (Ibid, p.53).

Penelope Eckert claims that girls and boys learn to exhibit different behaviour and eroticize the opposite behaviour as part of the ways in which heteronormativity shapes gender identities:

Girls develop a desire to look up at a boyfriend. They see themselves leaning against his shoulder, him having to lean down to kiss her, or to whisper in her ear. They learn to be scared so they can have him protect them; they learn to cry so he can dry their tears. This concentration of desire is perhaps the most powerful force in the maintenance of the gender order. (2002, p.109)

With this in mind it is easy to see why the film industry received wisdom is that young men take dates to a horror film, so that they can put their arm around them when they cower in fear.

They will come to eroticize such masculine qualities as size, strength, authority and forcefulness; since heterosexuality is framed as an attraction of opposites, that also means they will want to display the complementary qualities – weakness, subservience and passivity – themselves. (Cameron and Kulick, 2003, p.141)

Eckert argues that for teen girls, the desire to reproduce these feminine heterosexual performances, that is, to acknowledge and respond to ideologies and thereby recognize themselves as subjects, is less about heterosexual desire than peer group acceptance. Stephanie Taylor’s work on gendered conflicts in identity work (2010) has shown that the expectation on women to prioritize others’ needs before their own has multiple impacts on their ability to position themselves as creative workers. They must navigate pressures, such as the requirements to be the dutiful daughter and a domestic manager, that conflict with the apparent selfish immersion of the exemplary artist.

The film industry makes and markets different types of films for the different genders. UK film industry audience research (Buckingham, 2005, BFI, 2012) indicates that romances and period dramas are thought to appeal predominantly to women, action and science fiction to men (although films like “Twilight” and “The Hunger Games” might help to change this). Comedy is watched by a more balanced male and female audience, and applied to any genre it appears to make that genre more palatable to the other sex, e.g. men will more readily watch romantic comedies than tragic love stories (Buckingham, 2005).

... stereotypes make perfect business sense to Hollywood executives, who self-consciously attempt to mirror and trade on cultural idioms about age, race, and gender. Cultural stereotypes are embodied in the industry's product, figure prominently in its marketing strategies (Bielby, 2009, p.8-9).

But how much do audience tastes reflect the fact that these films are designed and marketed towards them in the first place?

One of my research participants, who works for a film distribution company, told me that test audiences are frequently designed to reflect the expected audience for a film. The possible consequence of this might be that their feedback and any subsequent alterations to the film and its marketing might exclude other possible audiences, making the process very self fulfilling. A film written for and marketed towards men is likely to attract a substantially male audience, reinforcing the perception that only men want to watch this type of film. Would women watch more action films if the films had better and more interesting female characters and themes that reflect women's interests? Evidence suggests so (Hare, 2009).

Judith Butler asks “Is there some commonality among “women” that pre-exists their oppression, or do “women” have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone?” (1990, p.7) I would like to adapt and reframe this to ask whether there is any commonality among women audiences, as perceived by the film industry, and whether as artists woman can be generalized as creating different products, or whether these differences are all produced as a result of the construction of gender? Linda Seger, a highly respected film industry script consultant, interviewed 200 women working in film across the world and concluded that

women want to tell different stories in film than men, but that they struggle to find support in the industry or get these films made. She argues that women want to tell stories about character, emotions, behaviour and relationships, as opposed to men who tell different stories of action and conflict and heroism (Seger, 2003). Marsha McCreadie, in her interviews with female screenwriters from across the globe, examined how this ‘female sensibility’ has been defined and questions whether it exists at all (McCreadie, 2006). Most of her women writers shied away from the notion of sex differences in relation to writing styles or content, with only a few believing that women’s writing is more ‘interior’, more about personal issues. However, feature film has become more synonymous with the stories that Seger says men want to tell, particularly the big budget studio films that dominate the box office and studio-owned cinemas, and are certainly perceived as being for male audiences. I will return to this discussion of gendered tastes as part of my analysis of my interview data in Chapters Four and Seven.

Bielby and Bielby describe how women are disadvantaged in successful screenwriting by the institutional typecasting of their work – that they are only seen as able to write ‘female appearing films’ (Bielby and Bielby, 2002) aimed at a female audience. The same restrictions do not seem to apply to men¹⁰, as illustrated by one of my male fieldwork participants:

...certain people seem to think that I write women well, which I don’t particularly agree with, but I’ve written a film that did all right and had a female protagonist, so... you can see how that is extrapolated.
(Will, screenwriter)

The prevalence of male leads (Smith et al., 2015) however, does suggest that male writers are more likely to write ‘male appearing films’. Ros Gill points out that “the relationship between the gender of media producer (whether journalists, editors, script writers or directors) and the nature of gender representations is an extremely complex one” (Gill, 2007b, p.36).

¹⁰ For example from 2013’s BAFTA shortlist for Outstanding British Film: “Anna Karenina”, written by Leo Tolstoy (novel), Tom Stoppard (screenplay) and directed by Joe Wright and “The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”, which while based on a novel written by a woman (Deborah Moggach) was adapted for the screen by a man (Ol Parker) and directed by a man (John Madden).

Employing a female screenwriter and a female director may be more likely to get you a female centric project with an increased number of female characters, female crew and female-friendly themes (Smith et al., 2012), but it is not necessarily going to get that film made as it has to pass through, in Gill's words, "many intervening mediators and practices" (2007b, p.36) in which women feature only as a minority, if at all.

Gill criticizes Linda Christmas's study of journalists, in which she suggested women write news in a different manner to men (Christmas, 1997). Gill argues that women are not a homogenous group that should be generalized in such a way, and that the study was based on perceptions, not actual practice. She argues that the danger in research like Christmas's is that it can "end up producing a situation in which women get given stereotypical or traditionally feminine, low-status assignments" (Gill, 2007b, p.126)¹¹. To return to Bourdieu in the light of these critiques, what makes him so useful for a feminist analysis of the world of work, and real world injustices, is that he moves beyond the arguments of construction and performance and "does not lose sight of the fact that if women are socially constructed as women, that means that they are women" (Moi, 1991, p.1034). This seems particularly pertinent to the debates about female creativity: whether women write differently from men, have different interests, styles and points of view, or whether these differences are all part of the construction of gender and a reinforcement of gendered tastes and habitus. Gill claims that the demand for women-only spaces has led to fears of ghettoizing and the "re-naturalization of sexual difference" (Gill, 2007b, p.35). Certainly that seems to be what happens in the film industry, where female leads are seen in only a small range of story types, and female writers are employed to write these type of films more than any other (Francke, 1994, Sinclair et al., 2006).

¹¹ I will also come back to the status of women's interests and creative work in Chapter Seven.

Indeed, if they accept such “gendered” assignments, female screenwriters risk reinforcing the perception that women are good at, and interested in, writing these stories. Similarly, as the film is then marketed towards women it is likely to attract a substantially female audience (or put off a male one), reinforcing the perception that women want to watch this type of film. Indeed women may be enjoying those films more than male-oriented action movies, but it may be difficult for women to recognize the forces at play in constructing their pleasures and preferences. Gill has highlighted the problematic nature of ‘women’s media’, observing a tension between those who believe women’s pleasures are often ignored as unimportant and those who recognise that some of the messages in these media can uphold gender stereotypes (Gill, 2007b).

We only have to consider some of the biggest box office successes of all time to see that women can write stories that appeal to men *and* women. The hugely successful “Harry Potter” franchise (Yates, 2011) was based on a series of books written by a female novelist¹² although the screenplays have all been written by men. Male novelist J. R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings” trilogy has been adapted by female screenwriters Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens (Jackson, 2003). The last “Harry Potter” film took US\$1,328.1 million worldwide and is the fourth highest grossing movie ever. The final part of Lord of the Rings took US\$1,119.9 million and is in sixth place (source: www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/). Amongst the most successful films with female screenwriters are Steven Spielberg’s science fiction blockbuster “E.T.” (Spielberg, 1982), the first of “The Terminator” franchise (Cameron, 1984) and the second of the “Star Wars” films: “The Empire Strikes Back” (Kershner, 1980).¹³ All these films have huge male audiences (and female) and it is unlikely that most

¹² However, novelist Joanne Rowling was advised by her publishers, Bloomsbury Children’s Books in 1997 to publish under the name J. K. Rowling because they believed a woman’s name would not appeal to the target audience of young boys. The ‘K’ is for Kathleen, her paternal grandmother’s name.

¹³ The films took US\$792.9 million, US\$78.3 million and US\$538.4 million respectively (source: www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/).

people would even know, or be able to tell, the gender of the screenwriter.

On closer examination, however, “E.T.” is a family friendly alien movie about a single mother and children trying to find their way in the world after the departure of their father. “The Terminator” is a narrative about a robot sent back to the past to kill the mother of the future resistance leader before he can be born and has a very strong female protagonist. “The Empire Strikes Back”, whilst containing all the essential elements of the “Star Wars” franchise, also contains a romantic plot between two central characters and the infamous almost soap opera-style idea that Darth Vader is Luke’s father. Is it possible to see in these films elements of a female sensibility, a way of seeing the world through female eyes, concerns that might be constructed as more relevant to the female lifecycle than the male one – families, motherhood, romance? If we understand gender as *habitus* and men and women are socialized to behave differently, to have different tastes, dispositions, inclinations and so on, then should we not expect that they have at least some different experiences, points of view and preoccupations?

Suggesting that there is no essential difference between men and women may be ideologically desirable but whilst we still live in a world where girls and boys are brought up to have different interests and experiences, we cannot ignore differences in women’s tastes and talents. In “Distinction” Bourdieu argues that taste and judgment in art and culture are artificial and constructed along class lines and “...the upper class propriety which treats taste as one of the surest signs of true nobility and cannot conceive of referring taste to anything other than itself” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.11). His argument seems to be transferrable as an idea from class to gender in the context of the issues discussed here. Just as the dominant class constructs its tastes and preferences as superior to the other classes, the dominant gender (male) is considered to have superior tastes and preferences to the dominated (female). I will

return to the issue of taste in greater detail in Chapter Seven. For now, consider replacing ‘working-class’ with ‘female’ in this quote:

It must never be forgotten that the working-class [female] ‘aesthetic’ is a dominated ‘aesthetic’ which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics. The members of the working [female] class, who can neither ignore the high-art aesthetic, which denounces their own ‘aesthetic’ nor abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, but still less proclaim them and legitimate them, often experience their relationship to the aesthetic norms in a twofold and contradictory way. (Ibid, p.41).

Female culture is so often denigrated, even by those who seek equality. Campaigns for more variety in clothing and products for girls like ‘Pink Stinks’ (www.pinkstinks.co.uk) and ‘Princess Free Zone’ (www.princessfreezone.com) whilst thankfully trying to broaden the choices for girls, can also risk devaluing the colour and choices that girls are socialized to be associated with and (frequently therefore) express a preference for. Many girls still grow up feeling compelled to identify by gender markers such as pink and princesses. I observe this every day with my own daughter and her friends, often to the great concern of their parents who recognize that male interests are perceived as more valuable and try to ban Barbie from their house, for example, and broaden their daughters’ interests. I will say more on my feminist methods and my positions as situation feminist and mother in the next chapter. Consider also why women might buy a Disney Princess phone case¹⁴, or buy the “BIC for Her” pen, which despite a huge media backlash have been very popular, at least according to BIC (Furness, 2012a), and certainly remains on shop shelves.

Although there is an increasing public awareness that girls must not be excluded from activities and interests traditionally associated with boys, there is less campaigning for boys to be allowed access to ‘girls stuff’. Indeed while most parents are happy to let their daughters play football or study STEM subjects, there is still a considerable stigma for boys who want to play with dolls or study nursing or childcare (or buy a BIC for Her), particularly

¹⁴ <http://www.redbubble.com/shop/disney+princess+iphone-cases>

with regards to the spectre of homosexuality¹⁵. I suggest that this is why young men are still so important to film financiers, despite evidence that they no longer make up the largest proportion of the audience. Women will go to see a male-orientated action film – it may not be appealing but it won't lead to questions or comments about their sexuality the way that a man queuing up for a romantic film might experience, particularly if unable to signal that he is there under duress from a woman in his life. It is important to deconstruct these gender limitations and allow both boys and girls access to as many choices, tastes and opportunities as possible in order to facilitate changes to gendered role assignation, and be careful of diminishing the pleasures and experiences of girls. Instead, we need to bring their stories centre stage, and allow boys and men as much access to 'female' pleasures as we allow girls and women to 'male' stories and pleasures. Until this happens, female stories and female storytellers will continue to be perceived by the film industry as having smaller audiences and therefore less value than men and their stories.

2.5. Conclusion

Much of the most influential scholarship on women at work (e.g. (Kanter, 1977)) proposes that structural factors are the most salient in maintaining inequalities in the workplace, and certainly these play a very key role. The main problem with structural theories, as Fenstermaker, West and Zimmerman point out, is "the implicit presumption in such work [is] that one's gender could be *overcome* interactionally, eventually prove no longer noteworthy, not require accommodation." (Fenstermaker et al., 2002, p.28). Initiatives to put more women onto boards of directors, or indeed to see more women screenwriters employed, are unlikely to succeed if they rely on a process of removing gender from being a

¹⁵ It would be interesting to explore this in more detail but I do not have room here to examine the link between the denigration of female culture and the fear of homosexuality, or indeed which causes which, but it is clearly a strong enough association to warrant extensive academic consideration. See for example NAYAK, A. & KEHILY, M. J. 1996. Playing it straight: Masculinities, homophobias and schooling. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 5, 211-230.

consideration. As feminist academics have shown, gender is not optional. For Judith Butler there is no being outside the gender performance and there is no situation where the performance of gender is not required. Indeed, some of the most gendered performances occur where only one gender is present, e.g. stag and hen nights (Fenstermaker et al., 2002). In Sarah Fenstermaker, Candace West and Don Zimmerman's language, "an individual involved in virtually any course of action may be held accountable for her/his execution of that action *as a woman* or *as a man* (Fenstermaker et al., 2002, p.29 original italics). It is possibly only through an understanding of the artificiality of gender and a questioning of assumptions that are attached to gender assignation that we can begin to envisage how real equality might be achieved.

In this chapter I have explored the usefulness of Toril Moi's 'appropriation' of Pierre Bourdieu's theories for an understanding of gender as part of the habitus. This enables an examination of gendered inequalities in real life situations that can simultaneously consider gender as socially constructed and yet acknowledge that this process produces gendered tastes, experiences and preoccupations. This provides a strong argument for women to be authors of screenplays and other stories, and why male screenwriters cannot simply write stories about female characters. Further, because of the potential stigma for men and boys who show an interest in products and concerns that have been socially inscribed as female, male preferences become more powerful. Women and girls are prepared to watch films about and for men, but men and boys are less likely to agree to watch films about and for women. Therefore although young men no longer make up the largest section of cinema audiences, their interests are dominant because they are the least likely to compromise.

Doing gender and doing work are "empirically intertwined" (Fenstermaker et al., 2002, p.38) and a growing body of work – to which this thesis makes a contribution – examines the way in which the two work together to maintain inequalities. Unless we can

deconstruct this process, what hope is there of more women being able to take centre stage and share their creative vision with the world as original creators such as screenwriters rather than simply nurturers, caretakers, assistants, agents and editors of male screenwriters (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015)? To see women's stories in all their variety and complexity is to contribute to the disintegration of the homogenous category of 'women' and to share women's experiences with a variety of men in ways that might help them to understand that we are not so different after all. Therein lies the possibility of change, crisis, trouble and the disruption of gender: in the creative work of women. As De Lauretis proposes: "to make up one's story, the possibility to speak as subject of discourse, which means also to be listened to, to be granted authorship and authori-ty over the story" is extremely attractive (De Lauretis, 1987, p.113) and quite possibly revolutionary.

In the next chapter I will outline my research methods, and discuss wider epistemological and methodological concerns arising from my research.

3. RESEARCH METHODS: SEARCHING FOR THE “TRUTH” AND THE WOMEN WHO AREN’T THERE.

It’s to do with money and because it’s a risk averse industry, people just want a safe bet, a safe pair of hands and unfortunately men are often seen as the safe pair of hands, they’re seen as ‘we know what we get’, ‘we know what’s going to happen’, ‘it’s not going to be all emotional’. (Vicky, employer)

I began my PhD with a political agenda - I wanted to effect change. For me, observation preceded theorizing since I had first noticed the gender imbalance of screenwriters during my time working in the UK film industry. As I said in the Introduction and Chapter One, I was instrumental in the commissioning of a scoping study whilst employed at the UK Film Council (Sinclair et al., 2006), the result of which confirmed my incidental understanding of the lack of female screenwriters. I identified as a film industry professional, and returning to academia was not only challenging, but - perhaps partly in response to my fears - I viewed it primarily as a means to an end rather than seeing my research as a way into the academy. I wanted answers and solutions that could improve the position of female screenwriters in the UK. I wanted my research to be objective and rigorously ‘scientific’ in order to provide results that could not be refuted or ignored by the film industry. Conscious that my research agenda may not be one that is visible or compelling to the dominant groups (Harding, 1987), I was afraid of being labelled an out of touch, troublemaking feminist in a post-feminist environment where women are predominantly viewed as being freed from past inequalities (McRobbie, 2009b). Or perhaps I was even afraid of being viewed as simply ‘feminine’ – incapable of rational, scientific, market-led research (Oakley, 1981). My research journey has led me to question these fears, and to find a methodology that bridges the gap between academia and industry, between feminist ideals and ‘real world’ impact.

I am fortunate to be guided into this new territory on the shoulders of feminist academic giants¹⁶ who have already interrogated established research methods and asked important epistemological questions. They have highlighted the implicit sexism in research that is concerned only with the activities, interests and experiences of men and yet presents this as universal (Oakley, 1974). They have sought to find methods that include women as subjects, participants and beneficiaries, whilst also taking steps to reduce the hierarchical relationship between researcher and researched (Harding, 1987). They have cautioned against assuming this inclusion brought us any closer to an objective, ‘truthful’ understanding of reality (Acker et al., 1991) and explored the ways that different research methods can be used, adapted, embraced and enhanced in service of feminist goals (Griffin and Phoenix, 1994, Oakley, 1999). They have led me to an understanding of the impossibility of objectivity and the necessity of recognizing one’s own situated position as researcher, which “allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, 1988, p.583). It is futile to try to research from a fixed or single feminist standpoint because our own identities are fluid and contradictory (Ibid), and because the category of ‘woman’ is both socially constructed and incredibly diverse. The challenge I faced in finding an appropriate research methodology is reflected in my subject matter: acknowledging gender is a social construct, but recognizing that it is still vital for feminist research that women and their experiences are recognized and respected, without essentializing or universalizing.

In this chapter, I will outline the methods I use to attempt to reconcile these conflicting concerns – by recognizing my own ‘split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positioning and be accountable’ (Ibid, p.586) - and by no longer seeking ‘the truth’ but by looking at how ‘truths’ and myths are carried in the discourses of those who

¹⁶ I hope it is clear that I am not suggesting these feminists are particularly physically tall, but I hope to evoke the idea first referenced by Isaac Newton in a letter in 1676 that we see further by building on previous discoveries.

work in the film industry, limiting possible subject positions that can be taken up by women and the work that they are ‘allowed’ to do. I will also discuss my attempts to overcome methodological problems specific to my subject matter and research question, in particular: how to account for and represent the opinions and experiences of female writers who may have already been put off or excluded from the film industry. I will also discuss the difficulties of research that is dependent on individual accounts and opinions on taboo subjects such as sexism and other forms of discrimination.

3.1. Truth, validity and developing a feminist approach.

My quest for validity and proving things already known initially seemed to suggest a quantitative approach¹⁷. I wanted to be able to return to the film industry, armed with facts and evidence that I could use to suggest changes and improve the position of female screenwriters. Having dedicated my professional life to words with only a cursory numerical concern for the page count of screenplays, numbers suddenly seemed very important:

I used to really hate numbers. Now I find numbers empowering. I find them empowering because they make anecdotal evidence a reality. They help us know we are not crazy. (Silverstein, 2011)

When I started this journey in 2006, many of those working in the UK film industry weren’t aware of the extent of the gender imbalance in screenwriting and neither did they see it as a priority:

Isn’t that a funny thing? Isn’t that a funny old thing? I didn’t even know that because screenwriters never get to meet each other. I was surprised to hear that. (Film industry participant, Sinclair et al., 2006, p.12).

A decade later, the statistics have proven invaluable in challenging perceptions that ‘things are changing’ naturally and no active intervention is necessary:

I feel like it’s less of a kind of situation than it was 5 or 10 or certainly 10 years ago. (Vanessa, Employer)

¹⁷ See SEARLE, C. 2004. *Researching society and culture*, Sage Publications Ltd. for a full discussion of the uses and differences of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

To be able to share evidence gathered over many years that the numbers of women participating in key creative roles isn't changing in any meaningful way (for example see Cobb, 2014, Lauzen, 2007, Lauzen, 2015) forces the argument to move on and address why this might be happening (or rather not happening). Even with the recent and dramatic increase of international dialogue about women's lack of participation that I discussed in the previous chapter, the percentages remain stuck. This stagnation emerged as a new focus of my research, and, realizing that the figures alone weren't producing change, I now needed a more qualitative method to take me into this uncharted territory.

Whilst early feminist condemnations of quantitative research and positivist approaches (e.g. Stanley and Wise, 1983) have been critiqued in favour of less prescriptive and more inclusive, tailor-made approaches (e.g. Oakley, 1999), qualitative methods still make an important contribution to feminist research as an "antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women" (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992, p.19). I decided to use the semi-structured, focused interview as my primary source of data collection (see Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2007 for a full discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of this method), as it allowed me to ask the same question of many people and compare answers, whilst providing enough flexibility for the participants to talk about matters they feel are important but that I may not have anticipated. I was still acutely aware of feminist cautions about this method:

The act of looking at interviews, summarizing another's life, and placing it within a context, is an act of objectification. (Acker et al., 1991, p.142)

I will discuss the particular challenges raised in the process of conducting my own interviews in the next section, but before that I would like to spend some time outlining my attempts to ensure the validity of this research method within a feminist framework.

Arguments about 'the place of the personal within research' (e.g. Stanley and Wise, 1983), resonated strongly as I considered how to examine an industry with which I was

already very familiar after more than a decade working in a variety of positions and organizations. Why was I concerned about the gender imbalance enough to want to do something about it when other colleagues weren't? How can I be sure that I am being objective when the topic of my research has, and continues to affect me personally?¹⁸ As a woman, I know some assertions made by participants in the scoping study do not reflect my own views and therefore may not be representative of other women, e.g. women don't show interest in or understand thrillers and horror films (Sinclair et al., 2006, p.51). It is this lived perspective that can provide the impetus for feminist research. As an "outsider within" (Fonow and Cook, 1991, p.3), I am in a position to "challenge the knowledge claims of insiders" (Ibid, p.3). Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1983) argue that researchers should not 'mistrust experience' or see it as inferior to theory. The personal is, after all, political (Hanisch, 1970) and objectivity may simply be a term that obfuscates power relationships (Haraway, 1988). Achieving objectivity in research seems very similar to achieving discrimination-free recruitment – how do you become aware of your own bias? Is it possible to eliminate it? Dorothy Smith quoted in Acker et al (1991, p.140) argues that "the knower turns out not to be the 'abstract knower' after all, but a member of a definite social category occupying definite positions within society" (Smith, 1974, p.16-17).

A favoured alternative to making claims of objectivity by feminist researchers is to be self-reflexive and acknowledge your own situated position as researcher (Acker et al., 1991, Haraway, 1988). It is challenging to have enough self-awareness or self-knowledge to take into account all possible privileges and perspectives in all situations. In addition, identity is not fixed and singular. Donna Haraway proposes we view our "split and contradictory self", as the best approach to "interrogate positionings and be accountable." (1988, p.586) I will

¹⁸ I have struggled to find work in the film industry since becoming a mother and during my research I have often read or heard things from my participants which resonate with my own experiences in the UK film industry.

attempt to make visible the elements of my identity of which I am aware and believe relevant to my research.

Throughout the course of one day, I move between my roles as a mother, friend, wife, feminist, film professional and fledgling academic “constructed and stitched together imperfectly” (Ibid, p.586) and all having an impact on my research. I juggle contradictory positions such as well known ‘employer’ of screenwriters and secret(ish) wannabe screenwriter. I am a feminist mother of both a girl and a boy, allowing me to observe first hand – and often despair at – the social construction of gender and the difficulties of stepping outside of proscribed gender roles (as I discussed in Chapter Two). I am also a daughter being supported through this research by her own feminist mother who suggested this path, pays my tuition fees and provides childcare to facilitate additional hours of study, a middle class privilege I am acutely aware of and grateful for. I am supported in a traditional domestic arrangement by my husband who works extremely hard so that we have a roof over our heads, pay our bills and feed our children. This often makes me feel uncomfortable as a feminist and reawakens my sense of failure at no longer having a career in film. He continues to encourage me to pursue my research even when it makes our lives difficult, and believes in the importance of what I am doing, even when I have doubts. This arrangement, however, also means I am often doing a double shift (Hochschild, 1983b). His paid work must be protected as it is our family income, so I am juggling a full time PhD with taking the children to school or nursery, looking after them the rest of the time, feeding them and helping with homework, reading, play, encouraging their social growth through play dates and organizing attendance at out of school clubs. As a consequence, I also find I am taking on the majority of the household chores, financial management, running everyone’s schedules and responsibility for the kinwork (Di Leonardo, 1987), and feeling the strain of these pressures on my time and energy. However, this has also given me an insight into the gendered distribution of unpaid

work within a household and how that might affect screenwriters and yet often be invisible in the labour market.

Through my reading of critical sociological writing on work in the creative industries, I am increasingly aware to the fact that my discontinued employment in the film industry may not have been down to personal failure – as I once feared – and yet still feel judged by my peers as not having the talent, determination or reputation to continue to ‘make it’ in a highly competitive industry. I am an older member of the post-graduate student community, continually comparing myself to those who are younger, have less conflicting demands on their time and have arrived fresh from their Masters degrees, up to date with academic thinking while I struggle to catch up. I have experienced sexism in my own life and career¹⁹ and may possibly benefit from my research (Acker et al., 1991) and whilst this motivates me and gives me insights into some of the key areas thrown up by my research, I have to be careful not to assume all women will or do suffer in the same way that I have. Conversely, I am aware of the privileges I have that others do not share: I am white, heterosexual, able bodied and middle class. I am conscious of how those without these privileges may suffer injustices that I am not even aware of and seek to better understand the intersection of gender inequality with these other groups within the context of my research (Valentine, 2007).

I follow Joan Acker, Kate Barry and Johanna Esseveld (1991) in applying some fundamental feminist principles when conducting my research: to produce knowledge that can be used by women themselves, to gain this knowledge using methods that aren’t oppressive and to “continually develop the feminist critical perspective that questions both the dominant intellectual traditions and reflects on its own development” (Ibid, p.137). I was concerned throughout the process to reduce any concerns my participants might have and to

¹⁹ I was made redundant whilst pregnant with my first child and my subsequent employer stopped paying me when I was pregnant with my second child. The lack of formal recruitment practices and the abundance of irregular, freelance work has made it difficult for me to find or sustain employment in the film industry as the mother of two with no income.

make the process beneficial for them as well as for me. To this end I agreed to share my findings with all the participants in the form of a brief summary written in plain language, and offered to answer any questions they had about my research at the end of the interview and at any point afterwards. I was mindful of the workloads of my participants and agreed to postpone meetings, to travel to them and to conduct interviews over Skype if necessary.

I have a continuing relationship with almost all of my participants. I have subsequently agreed to do favours for some of them, since they have been so generous as to give me their time and knowledge for free. I have read scripts, provided information on women in film and advocated on their behalf. Some of my participants were friends before I interviewed them. Some became friends as we discovered a common interest. Many have increased contact with me through social media and I know more about them – and they do about me – than I do about many other contacts and friends I have. I reassured my participants that no one would hear the interview recording except me and that their identities would be protected. I offered them the opportunity to not answer questions, and to withdraw from the research process during and after the interview, without consequence. In the next section I will discuss the interview process in more detail and reflect upon some of the challenges and surprises I encountered.

3.2. The messy business of interviewing.

The use of interviews has a history in film research but has most usually been applied to audiences (Cornea, 2008) and celebrities (Smith, 2002). It is also a widely used tool in the film industry – for recruitment, and for understanding and learning from successful practitioners, e.g. Q&As at festivals and after screenings (Ortner, 2010). It also closely resembles the process of a script meeting, which I have spent a considerable part of my professional life leading. This was advantageous as both myself and my participants were

familiar with the format and environment, but also presented some challenges. For example, it felt unnatural for me to speak very little. In a script meeting I would have been expected to make a contribution to the discussion, and indeed often lead it. This experience, combined with the fact that I had an existing relationship with many of my participants, meant that I had to be very careful not to introduce my views and opinions by, for example, asking leading questions. This was a skill that I became more adept at as my interviews progressed. However, I realized that I had an opportunity to draw on my professional experience and contacts and to attempt to “perhaps create a constructive bridge between the industry and academia” (Cornea, 2008, p.120). My participants generally appeared to be relaxed with me and willing to talk and I was able to put them at their ease in what was an already familiar scenario.

Indeed, I often felt that the participants were perhaps too familiar with the process of selling themselves and their businesses, as they launched into lengthy pitches of projects, or detailed explanations of their personal biographies, neither of which I could use for fear of revealing their identities. I felt a conflict between wanting to make my participants feel comfortable and relaxed and wanting to get beyond the usual answers and formulations.

People have ideas about what it’s like to be interviewed and they want to be asked questions so that they can give the ‘right responses’ (Acker et al., 1991, p.140).

Many of my respondents also reflected on the usefulness of their answers and overall contribution, before, during and after the interview, doubting their own expertise, declaring their perceived lack of knowledge and often showing an awareness of what was perhaps not an entirely acceptable term or opinion for them to be using:

Forgive me if I’m using the wrong kind of language (Will, Screenwriter)

Is any of what I’m saying making any sense? (Rob, Employer)

These behaviours were mostly exhibited when speaking about gender and the film industry, suggesting perhaps a degree of discomfort and/or awareness of the sensitivity of the subject.

Their doubt and anxieties required labour on my part to put them at ease, reassure them, and, in addition, some emotional labour to conceal my own discomfort at some of the things that were said. I also felt guilt that I might be deceiving people, especially those with whom I hoped to have an on-going relationship. I wrestled with my own conflicting responses to answers that I felt provided good material for my thesis, but at the same time might prove distressing for the participant if they were ever to read my work and recognize that I had selected their words to illustrate an argument of discrimination.

There were clearly identifiable advantages arising from my position as ‘part of the industry’. I didn’t have to go through a process of learning the vocabulary of the film industry or how the processes of script development and film financing work. My participants recognized that I understood their world and industry jargon, which helped me avoid errors that might arise from ignorance (Acker et al., 1991) and created an environment where my participants felt they could trust me as I was one of them and not some detached academic to whom they had to explain even the most basic concepts. Like Joan Acker, Kate Barry and Johanna Esseveld, I hoped that this would provide an atmosphere of relaxed trust and sensitivity:

We were studying people who had experiences very similar to ours, although of course there were important differences (the most important one being our status as researchers) and we were thus sensitive to problems and issues that might otherwise have been invisible. (Ibid, p.146)

As observed by Stacey Oliker, I found the focused interview “malleable enough to follow emergent leads and standardized enough to register strong patterns” (Oliker, 1989:xvi quoted in Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2007:215).

I was in a strong position having worked in the UK film industry for so long to contact people that I knew, had worked with, or who at least knew of me. I had a very high response rate, with only two people not replying at all and everyone else agreeing to be interviewed. In contrast to Sherry Ortner’s (2010) observations about the difficulty of accessing insiders in Hollywood, I was able to include in my sample some of the most senior

and experienced members of the UK film industry and reach a breadth of companies of different sizes, success rates and backgrounds. Conversely, I was also able to include individuals that might prove more difficult to identify for researchers without my knowledge and access. I spoke to unproduced screenwriters who had worked for a substantial number of years in the industry, and was able to identify key employees with a track record that may not be obvious from their current position. I was happily surprised by people's willingness to discuss a possibly contentious, and 'worthy' issue such as gender inequality – and also a little flattered. Having faced a personal crisis after losing two jobs whilst pregnant and becoming fearful that I had been cast out of the industry to which I had devoted most of my adult life, the positive responses helped restore my confidence that I was remembered, respected and still connected.

However, it also caused me to have concerns about my power as the researcher. I was aware that I was looking for evidence of sexism and other discriminations that the participants may not even themselves recognize as such, and their expectations of how I might use their data might not be accurate. They were likely to think of themselves as egalitarian and certainly in no way discriminating and in fact many of the men in particular were keen to present themselves thus to me:

I have a slight prejudice myself, which is generally speaking I prefer working with women and generally speaking I prefer women. (Pete, employer)

I had rarely witnessed an incident of explicit sexism or racism in my working life and I knew that I was looking for something subtler. As the interviews progressed, I often had conflicted feelings about some of the content – elated to hear statements and discover patterns that I felt began to illuminate the issues, but guilty that I might be using friends and colleagues in illustrations of discriminatory practices and discourses, and afraid that, if they were to read my thesis and publications, they might recognize themselves or their words despite my attempts to protect their identities.

As it was, some respondents who were my closest friends repeatedly postponed our meetings until I began to suspect that they were secretly uncomfortable with the idea of me interviewing them but too kind or polite to say so, despite my repeated assurances that I would understand if it was something in which they didn't want to take part. As I had no shortage of participants, I silently released them from the process, contacting them again only after I had completed my fieldwork. There were also a couple of the more senior figures that had to rearrange repeatedly due to workload pressures and I eventually had to employ a cut-off date beyond which I could no longer wait to interview them, for the sake of progressing with my analysis of the data. One successful female screenwriter was asked not to participate by the publicity department of the Hollywood studio releasing her current film. Despite reassurances of anonymity I was unable to persuade them or her, and – along with the other senior figures who were proving difficult to pin down – I was left wondering if they actually just felt the subject was a low priority for them, perhaps too contentious, and if they, like my friends, felt it was politer and more politic to postpone than to turn me down.

In the end I was able to conduct forty semi-structured interviews with screenwriters and employers of screenwriters, lasting between half an hour and two hours. The 'employers' range from individual producers working as sole traders, to the senior personnel of large production companies, distribution companies, public financiers and broadcasters, all of whom have some authority in the hiring of screenwriters. The screenwriters had, at the time of our conversations, experience ranging from no produced features to more than twelve feature film credits. My participants included thirty four white and six non-white participants, including three of Indian background, two describing themselves as African black British, and one who was brought up in England and Jamaica. My sample was deliberately weighted to include a higher percentage of females (23 out of 40) than is found in the UK film industry generally. All the participants' identities are protected by the use of pseudonyms and I have

not provided any demographic information when quoting from the interview transcripts. However, if a particular feature of someone's identity is relevant I highlight it in the text. This is important in order to capture aspects of intersectional experience, but unfortunately runs the risk of reproducing patterns where whiteness is normalized.

I deliberately chose not ask my participants for any information about their socio economic background and there were a variety of reasons for this. How to identify an individual's class is a complex and contested endeavour (BBC, 2013) and without a lengthy discussion of definitions I did not feel that participants' voluntary assessment of themselves would be particularly helpful to the fine-grain analysis of the British film industry that I am attempting to provide. Most critically, there is evidence of reluctance to identify as upper class (Young, 2014), which reflects my personal experience of working with the film industry, where anecdotal biographical information circulates in whispers and gossip ("did you know his family own half of Westminster" is a typical comment). I believed that if I asked the participants to tell me their own class I would get a long list of 'middle class' claims that would conceal the extent of privileged backgrounds and financial independence that can frequently be found within the UK film industry. In addition I believe that class in the film industry is best viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, as it is complicated by being visible not only as financial capital, but particularly as social and cultural capital too, and demands a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the possibilities of exchanging these forms of capital than was possible within the scope of my project. Pierre Bourdieu has shown that, in creative work in particular, formal qualifications or educational capital are "a genuine ticket of entry only for those who are able to supplement the official qualifications with the real-social-qualifications" and "provision of financial aid (a sort of advance inheritance)" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.152). I have introduced Bourdieu's ideas in Chapter Two and will come back to the usefulness of Bourdieu's theories for an understanding of the film labour market

in Chapter Seven. A degree of evidence of an individual's access to financial capital, social capital, cultural and educational capital is provided through their own biographies and talk and this is a much more accurate way of understanding certain class advantages in the film industry than asking individual participants to identify their own class background. In Chapter Five I explore in detail how my participant's talk about education and social connections reveals how these class privileges are key to getting in and getting on in the British film industry. For my purposes here, I will now briefly illustrate some of the ways in which my conversations contained proxies and other indications of membership of the wealthier and more privileged classes, not only by many of my participants, but by many in the British film industry as a whole.

My interviews were peppered with references to private schools and attendance at Oxford or Cambridge universities (as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five), suggesting that individuals in the film industry frequently come from families who are in a position to be able to pay for their children's education. Pupils from fee-paying schools are "five times as likely to attend Oxbridge" (Gurney-Read, 2015). Although concerns were sometimes voiced about getting paid and finding work, participants also talked about having cleaners and professional child-care and being financially supported by parents and partners. Screenwriter Fiona recognised "some people don't have to worry about paying the rent", employer Laura described how common it was to see people "come into the film industry with personal wealth", and Paul, who didn't grow up in the UK, had noticed his peers "making films for their friends in Hampstead²⁰, that's it." Even when talking about their upbringing, activities that were mentioned such as tennis, theatre, museums and foreign travel suggest the presence of a degree of financial and cultural capital. The combined effect of

²⁰ Hampstead is an area of London. According to Wikipedia it "has some of the most expensive housing in the London area" and "more millionaires within its boundaries than any other areas of the United Kingdom".

references such as these to signifiers of social position clearly indicate the underrepresentation of those of lower and lower-middle class backgrounds in the UK film industry.

The challenge to preserve anonymity was not inconsiderable. I am well known, even in an industry where everyone must know everyone else, as I held a senior position at a publically funded organization, the UK Film Council, and many people are also aware of my doctoral research. When participants would suggest meeting in private members clubs used frequently by the film industry I would have to remind them that it might be difficult to retain their anonymity in such circumstances. Going to their offices proved a similar risk as often I would bump into other people who work in the film industry as I approached their building, or indeed inside their very offices. I would often find that participants had discussed my research with mutual friends and colleagues before and after the interview and many would ask who else I was talking to, which I of course declined to reveal. Indeed, many of my participants felt that anonymity was not necessary, which added to my anxiety about their expectations of my analysis of their interviews. Two of my interviews did not record successfully to my utter dismay, for technical reasons. One of these was with a very experienced male screenwriter who insisted that I interview him in half an hour over the phone. After six months of postponements the day finally arrived and I was unfortunately let down by the software I had purchased to record the phone call, even though I had carried out several tests. This particular participant surprised me by holding what I considered were pretty old-fashioned views about women, and I couldn't help feeling a little resentful that he had felt unable to let me come to his office in person (where he was at the time of the call with his assistant), or indeed was unwilling to conduct the interview over Skype, on which I had recorded successfully many times by this point. We had, I believed, a long and friendly relationship already in existence, and whilst I was mindful of his commitments and grateful

that he would participate at all, I suspected that this wasn't a subject that the research participant considered very important or was willing/prepared to discuss in detail.

Interviewing my participants presented challenges that provided useful insight into their working lives. For example, it was the screenwriters of all levels who had to reschedule more often than the employers, often because they had been called in for a script meeting or had an opportunity to pitch new ideas to a potential employer. They spoke of working through the night or all weekend, and not having even an hour to spare for me, suggesting the pressures and time demands on screenwriters which may have an effect on those who are able to take up the role, especially anyone with caring responsibilities, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Six. The less established screenwriters also presented me with a concern about what they might want in return from me, particularly those screenwriters to whom I have been supportive in the past and who might consider me as having better connections to senior industry personnel than they themselves, and who may value my own opinion of their screenplays as someone who has held a senior development post. In the end I did read and give notes on new screenplays to several of my participants – something I would normally charge a considerable fee for and which ate into my time. These requests were made (often a long time) after my interviews had been conducted and were not part of a straightforward deal, but more like a *quid pro quo* and I felt bound, and indeed happy to give my time as they had done for me.

On the other hand, I was often “interviewing up” (Mayer, 2008) and felt my power as a researcher shift and almost disappear when approaching and interviewing senior employers and screenwriters (for a full discussion of power relations in an interview situation see e.g. Grenz, 2014, Oakley, 1981), who have considerable status and even their power to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to being interviewed affected my fragile perception of my own status in the industry, as well as my perception of the status of my research. I found it difficult to escape the idea so

prevalent in the film industry that some opinions had more weight than others, even though I was aware that I couldn't disclose the identities of my participants. Then, once in a room with them, I was very aware of the possible impact of my own future career when interviewing those who might be able to offer me employment or indeed social capital through my association with them depending on how well we got on or what they thought of my research. My unique position as both insider and outsider gave me access but it also added another layer of awareness to the interview process. I was, however, delighted to be able to include the experiences and opinions of important and influential figures and recognized that my research results would reflect the realities of working at all levels in the UK film industry and would not be confined to those at the beginning of their career, or to public events where the industry "presents itself" (Ortner, 2010). Certainly my work is not limited to "that inside [which] is, as with so much classic anthropological work, among the less powerful" (Ibid, p.213).

Interviewing friends and colleagues, personally recommended participants and well-known figures in an industry I had been part of for many years, it was hard not to be self-aware. The participants would often draw me into their answers, referencing and sometimes criticizing my position in the film industry and my presumed expertise:

...you would know this better than anyone (Ian, Employer)

You're kidding? Really? Seriously? Natalie Wreyford doesn't know who Script Shadow is? (Rob, Employer)

...we've had this conversation before (Frank, Employer)

I found it difficult to interview male screenwriters who were still in the process of establishing themselves, and whom I may have been very supportive of in the past. I felt uncomfortable talking to them about the struggles of female screenwriters, whilst knowing that they were also facing numerous barriers. I found myself trying to justify their generous contribution of time and opinions by referring to intersectional areas of my research, such as

the barriers faced by those of black and minority ethnic as well as less privileged socio-economic backgrounds, in order to combat my guilt that I may be making their lives more difficult by implicitly suggesting employers need to look to more women screenwriters. It is also possible to read this as an instance of me doing gendered emotional work in the interview (Hochschild, 1983a). Did I, as a woman, feel responsible to foster, nurture and support the male screenwriters? I will discuss the gendered dynamics of the artist and nurturer further in the next section and in the next chapter, but it is interesting to note here that a similar process seemed to have been apparent in the interview process, perhaps due at least in part to my previous film industry employment as a supporter of screenwriters.

I was also quite hurt when participants I really liked expressed what seemed to me to be discriminatory attitudes towards women, and equally elated to discover those who shared my views. When interviewing screenwriters, I often experienced jealousy and felt very self-critical of why I had not pushed myself to follow that path, even whilst hearing their tales of hardship, rejection and frustration.

3.3. Methodological challenges.

From the start of my PhD there were two clear issues that I knew would be challenging to my research and for which I needed a strategy to address. The aim of this section is to outline these concerns and my proposed solutions. The first problem was how to include the experiences of women who are not there. My second and no less challenging concern was how to uncover discriminatory behaviours. I will outline each problem in turn along with my methods for addressing them within my fieldwork.

3.3.1. Including the missing women.

My research is seeking to understand a lack, and whether women have been put off, excluded, discriminated against or simply have no interest in screenwriting. I'm interested in

those who might be missing from the UK film industry. A feminist qualitative methodology that seeks to capture the voices and experiences of women presents me with a fundamental stumbling block: where are these female screenwriters, if they have already been excluded from the UK film industry? Would they even be able to identify themselves? One of my key aims: “representing the unrepresented, which in itself provides a rationale for speaking directly to practitioners” (Cornea, 2008, p.119), seems to be limited by the fact that some female screenwriters may never have become a part of the industry and therefore are not able to be interviewed. It isn’t sufficient to include the opinions of those who do identify as screenwriters. Notable conclusions can be drawn from studying the working patterns of those female screenwriters who are working, and comparing their experiences to those of male screenwriters, but women who have had a degree of success may already be skewed to a certain demographic, e.g. writing ‘women’s films’ (Francke, 1994) and their tastes and opinions might not reflect a wider pool of potential female screenwriters. I was able to learn about the subjective experiences of female screenwriters as an under-represented group that is also understudied and give them a voice. Their insight into the difficulties for women as screenwriters was rich and detailed and they were able to observe and articulate barriers, limitations and special treatment that they had experienced and not always overcome. However, I found it more difficult to include the voices of all aspiring female screenwriters who might be out there.

A possible answer – which was suggested to me by some participants as well as in numerous unsolicited comments from associates in many different parts of my life on hearing my research topic – is that the missing women might be writing for different media. There are certainly writers who are working across both television and film, such as Abi Morgan and Peter Morgan. Although women make up just 26% of those writing for film, they actually make up 53% of writers in the whole population, 45% of novelists and 50% of journalists

(Sinclair et al., 2006). In 2007 after the publication of the scoping study (ibid) whilst at the UK Film Council, I led a panel discussion at the Hay Literature Festival in conjunction with Women In Film and Television. We invited both successful female screenwriters and successful female novelists to discuss the gender disparity between the two professions. The resulting conversation strongly suggested that the novelists had always wanted to be novelists and in no way did they consider themselves failed or repelled screenwriters. However, half of the screenwriters had worked in other positions with the film industry before becoming screenwriters. In addition, from my professional background, I was aware of a growing number of ‘employers’ who had crossed over into becoming screenwriters. This was backed up by some of my participants:

I know other producers who have done it...I met a producer the other day who’s now a writer and she was like ‘oh my god I’ll never look back, I’ll never go back to producing ever’. (Vicky, employer)

In addition, there are well known figures such as James Shamus, who is a producer and CEO of Focus Features and yet has many screenplay credits including “The Ice Storm” (Lee, 1997), for which he won Best Screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival in 1997. Jeff Pope spent many years as a television producer before starting writing and in 2014 he won the Best Adapted Screenplay BAFTA for “Philomena” (Frears, 2013). Far more common and less visible to those outside the industry, are a significant number of development executives, who either combine their work with screenwriting, or have left their jobs to make a serious attempt at screenwriting. This observation was also supported by my participants:

There are people I know of have gone from development into screenwriting (Vanessa, Employer)

It is often suggested that women are more suited to, and therefore more likely to take up nurturing roles within the industry (see for example Sinclair et al., 2006). These nurturing roles are commonly perceived as being the producers, agents and particularly development executives, who are so often female that they are sometimes referred to as ‘The D-Girls’.

Wikipedia says

A **d-girl** (a.k.a., **development girl**) is a non-influential, entry-level staffer in a film production company. Responsibilities include: finding and identifying story ideas worthy of adaptation into a script – and potentially – a feature film; and, writing script coverage for scripts submitted to the production company.

It is interesting to note that the Wikipedia entry reproduces a gendered perspective by devaluing both the development role and failing to mention the caring and nurturing work carried out by those in this position (see Hochschild, 1983a, her groundbreaking examination of emotional labour and the way this is devalued in the workplace as women's natural ability). Certainly women are found more frequently in nurturing roles than they are in others such as production crew and facilities, where they are working with primarily male 'creatives' – screenwriters and directors – to help them develop and perfect their product.

Are most agents women? Probably. I mean there's definitely a lot of women. Which is true it is more nurturing. And developers. I mean what about the whole 'D-girl' thing? (Gillian, employer).

The work done between development executives and screenwriters closely resembles Pamela Fishman's (1978) observations about the work done by women in conversation with their male partners. Fishman observed that there is "an unequal distribution of work in conversation" (Ibid, p.404). Women ask three times as many questions as men – a device which is used to encourage a response. They also do support work, inserting encouraging noises when men are talking, without interrupting or attempting to take over the talk, but demonstrating interest in the speaker's talk. Men, on the other hand, use mostly statements and are much more likely to try to stop a topic of conversation from continuing by either not responding, or using a minimal response to discourage interaction. This strongly suggests that the work of a development executive, navigating and ensuring the continuation of a particularly tricky conversation or series of conversations about a writer's embryonic screenplay, is 'women's work'. Indeed, this may be the reason that so many male producers, in development with so many male writers, chose a female for the development executive role – to facilitate the creative conversation and do the conversational work. For women, it is perhaps a way to be involved in the creative process of script development without having to

face the risks of pushing themselves into the limelight as the screenwriter or taking a freelance position which might be more incompatible with childcare (see Chapter Six):

...women tend to be quite good at nurturing. If you're interested in writing and you're not a writer yourself or you're interested in writing but you might be more prone to be in positions where you can be an editor, where you can be a development person, you can help people find their vision rather than going through the agony of going through jobs that are incredibly uncertain. (Eloise, employer)

What is clear from Fishman's study is that women are skilled at 'developing' men's topics, whereas men can rarely be bothered to pursue topics that women introduce (1978, p.404). Her work suggests that men may have more familiarity with the conversational behaviour that writers display at work and women may have more practice in the required conversational skills that development executives must exhibit. I am therefore proceeding on the assumption that it is possible that at least some of the missing female screenwriters are actually working in the film industry and that by interviewing those 'employers' who work closely with screenwriters, I may actually be capturing some of the voices of the missing women. Of the 'employers' I interviewed, more than half said they had considered screenwriting, or were indeed in the process of writing, indicating a great deal of fluidity between the roles which I shall come back to in more detail in the next chapter.

3.3.2. Articulating discriminatory behaviours

Few people want to be seen to be sexist, even if anonymously (Gill, 2000, Gill, 2014). I was prepared to receive hostility from participants who may consider that they are being blamed for doing something wrong when they themselves are working under very difficult conditions²¹. I was more concerned that my participants might deliberately try to conceal sexist opinions and practices. In addition, I was acutely aware that putting myself, as a woman, into the interview situation raises consciousness of the issue, just as Michael Moerman observed that "when ethnographers are silent and merely observe, their presence

²¹ Jobs in the film industry are stressful enough and subject to many other pressures – competition, make a good film, find an audience, get finance, attach actors, director, distribution, etc.

indicates to people that matters relevant to ‘identity’ should be highlighted” (Searle, 2004). Research ethics demand that I must be upfront about the topic of my research but I suspected that doing this might make my participants alter how they spoke about women, and cause them to be unusually alert to the need to mention some screenwriters who are women. On one occasion I walked into the interview to find my participant hurriedly scribbling a list of female screenwriters on his notepad. However, as my research evolved and I realized that my task was less about catching people out, or uncovering ‘truth’ and more about how those who work in the UK film industry talk about gender and screenwriting as I will outline in more detail below. Indeed, as a passionate activist as well as a researcher, I was able to view my fieldwork as a way to have impact by raising consciousness of the issue and indeed presenting people with data and statistics that made them question their own assumptions:

I just think it’s, the more I hear myself [laughs] or talk to you, I just think it’s completely male dominated. I mean I don’t know, but it is isn’t it? (Gillian, employer)

As an insider in this small community, I was aware when participants were not altogether straightforward or forthcoming with details of certain events. A recurrent example was when I asked them to talk about how they got their job. Several participants seemed to rewrite their biography to make the recruitment process seem more meritocratic by omitting details of contacts they had. For example Nick, one of the male employers suggested:

I was one of those examples of someone who actually did start from scratch with nothing in the industry. Um...slowly rose to mediocrity [laugh] and I’ve fooled enough people enough times to get back to [Production Company].

Whilst he positions himself as starting off with ‘nothing’, by which he appears to mean that he had no connections to the industry, and although he plays down his skills by referring to his ‘mediocrity’ and having ‘fooled enough people’, what he omits to say is that his current position was previously held by his wife, something that he knew I was aware of and indeed he mentioned her by first name later in the interview. This is not to suggest that he did not secure the job entirely on his own merits, but, as I will discuss in later chapters, since

positions are rarely advertised in the film industry it is likely that he had the advantage of being aware of the potential vacancy at the very least.

Focusing my fieldwork on the employers of screenwriters, as well as the screenwriters themselves also presented a means to encourage participants to talk about discriminatory practices. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the film producer, who is the main employer of screenwriters, has the role of ‘creative manager’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2007), and acts as a ‘key intermediary’ (Christopherson, 2008) between the buyers of screenplays and films and the writers themselves. Their role includes deciding which writers to approach and employ, which buyers to target, and whether to employ a new or experienced writer, take on a ‘spec’ script²² or commission an adaptation. They have a much better view of a spectrum of screenwriters than the writers themselves, who very rarely meet or work with each other. Most critically, producers position themselves as interpretive of market and audience tastes and I hoped this would enable some articulation of discrimination and prejudice as placed outside of the producers themselves, for example blaming distributors for wanting recognized talent or suggesting that audiences are primarily young and male (Sinclair et al., 2006).

However, more fundamental to my understanding the disarticulation of discrimination was my move away from the search for ‘objective’ truths, as discussed above, and my deepening understanding that sexism, along with classism and racism, wasn’t necessarily a conscious process which an individual might try to hide, but was inbuilt into social structures and that gender roles are constructed in a way that makes them seem natural and unproblematic. I no longer considered the interviews as a kind of super-text, which must be stripped away to reveal the true nature of the participants and the industry (Wetherell et al., 1987). Instead, I viewed them as examples of how talk within the film industry is actually doing the work of reinforcing gendered roles and stereotypes, limiting subject positions for

²² A speculative script is one written by the writer without being under commission, in the hope of finding a buyer for it once written.

women and upholding established discourses, which make change difficult. I am therefore drawing on discourse analysis, in particular the work of Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987), Wetherell (1998) and Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton (2006, 2012) to unpack how industry-wide discourses work to maintain gender inequalities. I will demonstrate that these discourses have become legitimized as ‘best practice’ by both screenwriters and their potential employers and highlight the function of the discourses, which go beyond talk to limit opportunities in the UK film labour market. The discourses that I will identify in the following chapters present exclusionary practices as logical, understandable and indeed often as good business practice, but first I would like to define the terms as I am using them.

3.4. Discourse analysis.

The terms “discourse analysis” and indeed “discourse” are used in a variety of ways, so in this final section I will outline my own understanding and use of these contested terms as I have applied them in my research. Discourse analysis has arisen out of a number of developments in different disciplines, including linguistics, psychology and sociology. Poststructuralists (most notably Michel Foucault, 1977, 1978) have expanded on work by critical linguistics analyzing the construction and modification of meanings through language, by developing genealogical methods to help understand the role and influence of discourses in society. Ethnomethodology and speech act theory stress that speech is a form of action and that people use language to do things and therefore it can be analyzed as such. Conversational analysis concerns itself with this fine detail of human interaction and exactly what talk accomplishes, and how. This has been criticized, however, because this analysis “depends upon the analyst ‘reading’ the context” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.33) since

people are not always explicit in their purpose. Furthermore, Margaret Wetherell highlights that:

If the problem with poststructuralist analysis is that they rarely focus on actual social interaction, then the problem with conversation analysts is that they rarely raise their eyes from the next turn in the conversation. (1998, p.402)

It is Wetherell's proposed "synthetic approach" (Ibid, p.405) of a discourse analysis that combines conversation analysis and post-structural thought to allow "the analysis of global frames of meaning and the situational accomplishment of identities" (Kelan, 2009) which I am implementing here. I also draw on Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton's extension of Wetherell's approach in their writing on the identity work done by an individual's talk in an active, performative way that is nevertheless "resourced and constrained by larger understandings which prevail in the speaker's social and cultural context" (Taylor and Littleton, 2006, p.24). Like them, I am interested in the implications of "collectively-held meanings and values" (2012, p.42), and seek to understand how these "'discursive resources'...influence what can be said" (Ibid). I will be identifying patterns and repetitions across the interview data in order to recognize what work is done in industry discourses about women and screenwriting, and how, and indeed if, the discourses are being challenged. However, in recognizing that identities are also occasioned, I additionally acknowledge the specific and active nature of the interview site, and the need to account for this in the analysis of the produced discourse (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003).

Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987) suggest that discourse analysis is particularly useful when studying how language is used to provide excuses for 'bad' behaviour. It is therefore a critical tool to examine how people 'justify injustice' (Gill, 2000) such as inequality of both opportunity and outcomes. Like Ros Gill (Ibid, p.76), I am interested in the 'practical ideologies' through which gender inequalities are understood. Potter and Wetherell, along with Hilda Stiven define practical ideologies as:

...the often contradictory and fragmentary complexes of notions, norms and models which guide

conduct and allow for its justification and rationalization. (Wetherell et al., 1987, p.60)

They argue that discourse analysis is of particular use to feminist research on employment opportunities because:

We should investigate the collectively shared practical ideologies which reconcile women and men to their employment options and structure representations of their social positions. (Ibid, p.60)

We can see, therefore, that discourse analysis may be useful not only in unpacking discriminatory, discursive practices, but also why some women might not pursue a career in screenwriting, or may limit themselves to writing certain types of story. Female subjectivity is formed when “discursive practices aimed specifically at women’s selves construct a version of what should be pleasurable for women and thus encourages specific female desires” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.110). Discourse analysis allows “the constructedness of taken-for-granted categories such as gender to be shown” (Kelan, 2009, p.56) and allows us to question what is understood as natural.

Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton (Taylor and Littleton, 2006, p.32) argue that an individual “is not ‘free’ to claim any identity” but is constrained by wider contexts. I am particularly struck by their use of Heilbrun’s “Writing a Woman’s Life” (Heilbrun, 1988) to draw attention to the limited narratives available for women.

Heilbrun (1988: 17) suggests that “women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over their own lives”. (Ibid, p.32)

In addition, they draw on Heilbrun’s observation that

...the available narratives of women’s lives emphasise “safety and closure” rather than “adventure, or experience, or life”, and marriage and family over work and public life as a source of fulfilment. (Ibid, p.32)

This chimes strongly with my own research on female screenwriters and how their work is constrained by the commonly held beliefs within the film industry of what it means to be a woman, as well as what it means to be a writer. As I illustrated in the previous chapter Taylor and Littleton’s work has been extremely helpful to me in analysing how women navigate creative identities. My research further illuminates just how “women have been deprived of

the narratives, or the text, plots or examples, by which they might assume power over their own lives” (2006, p.32) by uncovering some of the ways in which women’s voices, and therefore their stories, are being suppressed in the film industry.

3.5. Conclusion

My methodological approach has grown out of a grateful appreciation of quantitative data collected by others, into a more exploratory process in pursuit of a deeper understanding of how inequality manifests itself and is justified in a creative workplace like the UK film industry. At the same time, I have come to appreciate that my own experience is a valid source of knowledge, and anyway inseparable from the process of research. It is therefore necessary to identify and understand my wider positioning in order to avoid replicating patriarchal positionings of the objective researcher who is on a quest to discover ‘the truth’. I have attempted to negotiate the seemingly impossible challenge of capturing the experiences of women who may be missing from the screenwriting profession in the UK. I have sought out a way to understand the problem from the perspective of those who work as or with screenwriters, and discovered means to articulate factors of discrimination that were previously not easy to even consider as part of the debate within the film industry. I have discussed a range of challenges and dilemmas and investigated them in the light of the wider feminist methodological literature and believe that my research makes an important contribution to challenging the lack of female screenwriters in the UK and in helping to find ways to identify and address the problems that may be causing this lack. In the next chapter I begin my analysis of my interviews with screenwriters and their employers.

4. “IT’S JUST SOME SORT OF MAGIC THAT YOU GO AND DO”: DISCURSIVE WORK IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SCREENWRITERS AND THEIR EMPLOYMENT.

You can have people that are born with the greatest talents but they don’t have an opportunity - you’d never know would you?

(Paul, employer)

In this chapter, I will present analysis that identifies common themes in the talk of screenwriters and their employers when describing screenwriting work and will show how these recurring discursive patterns work to limit opportunities for women as screenwriters. Ros Gill has recently argued that sexism is “increasingly dynamic, mobile and agile, requiring more nuanced vocabularies of critique” (2014, p.511). My analysis makes a contribution to this discussion by identifying some of the most prevalent ways that screenwriting work is understood by those who do the work and those who employ them and then examining why this might work to make it harder for women to be part of this profession. I follow Margaret Wetherell’s (Wetherell, 1998) argument for a need to “render strange usual or habitual ways of making sense” in order to understand their power and utility.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first I will identify two key discourses (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, Taylor and Littleton, 2006, Wetherell, 1998) that are frequently drawn upon within the UK film industry, so that the ideas they contain “not only ‘stick’ but become hegemonic and pervasive” (Wetherell 1998, p.393). They form the context for how far individuals can position themselves as suitable subjects (or not) for screenwriting work and are utilized in a way that assumes these ideas to have “pre-existed an individual speaker’s talk” (Taylor and Littleton, 2006, p.29). I will first introduce the commonly held belief that creativity is an innate quality of certain special individuals, and then show how the film industry is presented as a meritocracy where these special individuals can expect to be ‘discovered’ and enjoy the rewards of their talents, if they remain committed. Stephanie

Taylor and Karen Littleton (2006, p.23) argue “identities are also social because they are resourced and constrained by larger understandings which prevail in the speaker’s social and cultural context.” My interest in this chapter is in how discourse shapes and upholds these constraints, limiting who can take up which identities.

In the second section, I will provide analysis of how the talk of film workers reveals counter - but no less prevalent – discourses that directly challenge those of the special creative individual and meritocracy. I will identify and examine recurring discursive talk on the subject of firstly collaboration and then creative homophily. I will argue for the need to contest accepted beliefs in order to find a way to a more inclusive workforce. Though seemingly unacknowledged as established ‘truths’ by those that use them, these contradictory discourses are still understood here as actively doing work. Following Wetherell’s argument for the importance of “investigation of the social and political consequences of discursive patterning” (1998, p.405), I will unpack the ways these secondary discourses are drawn upon and show the consequences for the continued gender inequality in screenwriting labour.

In the final section I will present an argument for why certain discourses continue to thrive in the UK industry, whilst others go unacknowledged. To do this, I will examine one final discourse: “it’s getting better”. This is a common way that gender inequality is disregarded by film workers in my study. Throughout this chapter, I am drawing on Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell’s argument that social discourses such as those which happen in an interview “do not just describe things; they *do* things. And being active, they have social and political implications” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.6). I am also influenced by Ros Gill’s (2000) interrogation of how the gender inequality of radio DJs is justified by radio stations, because I wish to unpack the practical ideologies through which continued gender imbalance is accepted by those who employ screenwriters, and by the screenwriters themselves.

4.1. Discourses of creativity and meritocracy in talk of screenwriting work.

In this section I will demonstrate that many of my participants drew repeatedly on two key discourses in our conversations. An examination of these discourses of the special creative individual and the film industry as meritocracy show how individuals within the UK industry make use of shared ideas of screenwriting labour to discuss who is considered suitable for the work. I will analyze how these aspects of screenwriting as a profession are understood by those who are doing the work, and by those who might employ them. Some of the data emerged from questions I asked all the participants, such as what they thought made a good screenwriter, and what was expected from a screenwriter, including hours worked, recruitment practices and expected remuneration. Other evidence of these discourses emerged from more general discussions on topics such as their own biography, working with directors and their views on the diversity of the UK film industry workforce. Both draw on wider discourses found in other creative industries and professions. Nigel Edley describes how speakers can make choices in the language they use, but “the options aren’t always equal. Some constructions or formulations will be more ‘available’ than others and they are easier to say” (Edley, 2001, p.190). This availability reflects which ways of understanding the world have become “dominant or hegemonic” (ibid). By drawing on dominant discourses in their talk, my participants were able to present certain arguments and practices as ‘common sense’ and, as a consequence, acceptable and unproblematic.

4.1.1. The screenwriter as special creative individual.

Howard Becker has shown that ‘the romantic myth of the artist’ is particular to Western societies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Becker, 1982) and that the dominant tradition in Sociology of Art “takes the artist and art work, rather than the network of

cooperation, as central to the analysis of art as a social phenomenon (Ibid, p.xi). As I argued in Chapter One, even academic critics and commentators who see through excessively positive assessments of creative work often do not question the individualized, ‘gifted’ (Banks, 2007, p.29) nature of creative work, so established is this idea in our culture. Screenwriting was consistently deemed to be a creative profession by my participants, and the notion of creativity as an innate quality possessed by certain individuals was a discourse repeatedly drawn upon to identify candidates who could fulfil such a screenwriting role:

Natalie: What, apart from time, do you think makes a writer?

Ian: Talent. Talent. Talent, talent, talent. (laughs) (Ian, employer)

...there’s some sort of innate quality there, it just happens easily for some people. (Robert, screenwriter)

...(Employers) still behave as though you’re hiring some unlockable capsule of genius that you can snap open at will and sort of sprinkle on the goodies and it will become genius. (Freddie, screenwriter)

You can learn and study the craft and the function and the layout and formatting of writing but that sparkle and wit and unique voice cannot be taught and that’s the illusive thing you’re always hoping for. (Nick, employer)

It is perhaps surprising that screenwriting is perceived as requiring such a unique, innate talent. As I recalled in Chapter One, Bridget Conor has convincingly demonstrated that:

In professional discourse and in popular culture, screenwriting is often framed and represented as the least creative form of writing due to a number of reasons: from its unashamed rigidity of form to its unapologetic commercial obligations; from its inherent collectivity that downplays and denies claims to individual creative authorship to its invisibility in comparison to other kinds of writing or filmmaking. (Conor, 2014, p.1)

Generally scripts are judged as inferior or imperfect art or craft forms, little more than a ‘blueprint’ for the final film or a document for raising money.

Screenwriting is a fascinating art form because it is an art form but you’re making a blueprint really, you know you’re selling a blueprint that somebody else is going to build. (Frankie, screenwriter)

One of my employer participants articulated a common and rather disparaging longing in the industry which illustrates how screenwriting is both held up to impossible standards and simultaneously judged as failing: “I crave the day I read a script and it blows me away. I’ve never had it yet.” (Colin, employer).

Despite this very critical appraisal of their work, screenwriters were still celebrated as gifted individuals in my interviews. As part of this discourse it was commonly argued that screenwriters could be recognized by an almost obsessive drive to write that takes precedence over other aspects of a more 'normal' life, such as having a family, a social life, or indeed sleeping and eating. The screenwriters talked about working through the night, getting up at 5.30 to work before the rest of their household woke, giving up holidays to write, even writing while they are actually in their 'day job'.

Oh my god, I work all the time. When I can. I keep saying to myself, I just want to take Friday off and just do stuff that needs doing around the house, you know? (Emma, screenwriter)

I tend to do my best writing work sitting at the computer writing between ten at night and three in the morning. (Esther, screenwriter)

I was writing in my office on the secret and we would write at the weekend, pretty much from Friday night to Sunday (Patrick, screenwriter)

Indeed, there was evidence that a screenwriter may be expected to continue to exhibit this devotion to their art even in extreme circumstances:

You know, I worked for somebody recently their mum died, then their dad died, and then another something happened - another writer had somebody tried to kill themselves. Somebody very close to them and so on and you just end up in a situation where you're 'Of course, you take all the time you need here' and things just last forever, options on books are running out and stuff like this. Come on! (Frank, employer)

You can pick up people are just not quite committed for some reason. Which could be anything. It could be too busy, could be family stuff, could be other stuff going on in their life, you don't know. I think you can pick up their ambivalence a bit. (Gillian, employer)

In these examples above there is a subtext that perhaps these screenwriters are not suitable for the job. There was also a very common and linked idea that success or failure in screenwriting is down to 'how much you want it', i.e. your ambition, commitment and priorities. In this way a creative personality was also to be recognized as someone unable to ignore this calling:

I think if I haven't done it maybe it doesn't mean enough to you. It has to be something that is so compulsive that you have no choice but to make it, you have no choice but to put yourself in that place where whatever you put on that page as being judged and exposed. (Eloise, employer)

You just wouldn't do it unless you felt so committed and so hungry and so, aside from being any good and having a bit of talent, those are the most important qualifications. (Jack, screenwriter)

I think it's about a burning ambition to express something and I think if you've got a burning ambition to express something you'll find a way somehow. (Martha, employer)

This all-consuming, obsessive notion of the creative individual, functions to exclude anyone with other responsibilities or demands on their time. Commonly, the low numbers of women in creative roles such as screenwriting was framed as women having more important things to do:

I'm not saying women aren't committed but we've got all this other stuff going on and as you get older you do have children. I think also women sort of get 'you know this industry is bullshit, I'm going to do something else'. (Emily, screenwriter)

So - 'I will not waste my time on this slightly fruitless pastime when I could be looking after the kids', that's quite conceivable. (Frank, employer)

This can be challenged in a number of ways, not least by looking at how the pressures of modern parenting fall predominantly on mothers and how the division of labour between male breadwinner and female caregiver is still the ideal organization of production (Kelan, 2008), and I will return to the challenges of motherhood in Chapter Six. The idea that women are more rational also wards off potential criticism of sexism by positioning women as somehow more sensible than men and functions as a sort of disclaimer to the idea that there is a problem that requires remedy. The discourse of 'how much you want it' conceals the very real barriers to entry that some people face. For example, it neatly side steps the evidence that creative workers such as screenwriters may struggle for years to make a living from their work (McRobbie, 2002b). This might make the profession off-putting for those unable to rely on family or partners to support them. It also obscures possible reasons why screenwriting continues to be dominated by white, middle and upper class men, by suggesting they are the only ones sufficiently foolish enough to want to be screenwriters:

So there's this kind of at a certain point they must think it's too tiresome and if you're a smart person you must think why am I being stupid? Whereas I think men find it easier to be pig-headed about things. (Freddie, screenwriter)

By suggesting creativity is a quality of an individual, over which they themselves have limited control, and by further describing men as innately 'pig-headed' and driven whilst

women are naturally more nurturing and common-sensical, the suggestion is that men are more inherently suited to screenwriting work.

Although there were some occasional acknowledgements to the roles of opportunity, encouragement and perseverance, this did not ever appear to override the notion that to be a screenwriter you need to be born with that magic ingredient that marks you out as ‘talented’.

There’s experience, but there’s also that level of talent, and some very, very talented people may not have to work as hard (laughs) to get things done (Paul, employer)

My mum used to teach singing - And she would say she could teach anyone to sing, her line would be anyone can have a voice and it might just take time to relax them. You know people would say ‘what about I’m off key’ and my mum would say ‘enough lessons I can get you to sing in tune’. It’s just about confidence and breathing and all these things, it’s about technique. And I suppose you could argue that maybe you could make the same parallel with writing. I’m not sure you can. (Martha, employer)

I think there has to be an aptitude exists in the pupil for the teacher to be able to learn their stuff. (Richard, employer)

Indeed, opportunity and perseverance were often discounted completely. Writing was construed by the employers as something that can be done anywhere and by anyone, even the least advantaged, if you had the drive to be creative within you:

You could say technically if J.K Rowling²³ could write a book in a café as a single mother then everybody could do it but clearly for her it was compulsive, it was probably a way to escape her life and it came from within, you know. (Eloise, employer)

In contrast, the screenwriters would often express notions of creativity as being something they were “drawn to” (Patrick, screenwriter), a preference or interest as much as an ability you are born with.

I think people can be creative in lots of different ways, but in terms of what we’re doing, I just think specifically you’re just either that way inclined or you’re not. (Patrick, screenwriter)

I think one of the key characteristics a writer has to have is curiosity and about everybody that’s around you, or the world that’s going on around you, or what’s going on in the world, or just being able to sponge things up really and then to be able to feed that into a processor and hope that some drama comes out at the end of it. (Natasha, screenwriter)

I didn’t have a notebook aged 6 that said when I grow up I want to be a screenwriter. That said, my brother and I would watch, -I’m sure other children do this - but we would watch films obsessively and quote them obsessively and deconstruct them obsessively and so that kind of process was bubbling away from quite an early age. (Will, screenwriter)

²³ Joanne Rowling is the author of the hugely successful “Harry Potter” novels (ROWLING, J. K. 1997. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, London, Bloomsbury.)

The screenwriters also recognized the profession as one requiring craft skills, and believed that this aspect of screenwriting labour, at least, could be taught, or learnt through practice, and indeed might make all the difference:

You can come up with a great premise or a good character and write it down on the back of a napkin and think you're brilliant but actually crafting it is just so difficult. (Emma, screenwriter)

I think writing for film and television and all of them, even radio, is more akin to being an architect than anything approaching being an artist. You know, seeing the shape, seeing the structures that hold the story up, the place and time where you place things. I think, it is a craft, it's not an art. (Tony, screenwriter)

There was also a discourse of practical necessity which conflicts with the idea of natural ability, or indeed even lifelong attraction to the profession:

So in order to get to direct the kind of stories I want to direct almost always involved rewriting as well, but it's always been in that order, pragmatically, rather than - I never thought I want to be a writer. (Frankie, screenwriter)

When I was at drama school I wrote a full-length play and I decided I wanted to do that more than act because I'd fallen out of love with acting. (Tony, screenwriter)

However, despite these hints at a possible alternative discourse of personal choice and opportunity, most participants drew upon the culturally established discourse of the special, talented individual artist as genius to present the ideal screenwriter as a person who is driven to write screenplays at the expense of other parts of their life. In doing this, they also contribute to another connected and very prevalent discourse that was drawn on by many of my participants: that of the film industry as a meritocracy, which naturally those who are already working in the film industry have a vested interest in upholding. It is important to understand what implications this has for those trying to build a career in a profession where most of those who succeed are rich, white and male.

4.1.2. The myth of meritocracy.

The 2009 Skillset and Women in Film and Television report "Why her?" highlighted a belief amongst creative women that they worked in meritocratic industries "it's more about whether you can do a good job rather than what sex you are" (Creative Skillset and WFTV,

2009: Industry Culture and Attitudes). Those interviewed for the report suggested the under-representation of women might be due to a lack of awareness on the behalf of young girls that they can do it. This in turn indicates a lack of awareness amongst those working in creative industries of the barriers that women might face. In my research conversations, the notion of the film industry as a meritocracy was drawn upon many times, with employers eager to stress that they don't care who the writer is, it's simply the story, the script, and the quality of writing that they are interested in:

We are so craving for good stories for something they can go and make so if it's written by a man or woman I don't think they care less. I really do. (Eloise, employer)

The good thing about being a writer, I think, particularly here, is you don't need to be accredited, I mean if there's just a fabulous script, you're in. No-one cares who wrote it. (Pete, employer)

I don't care whether they are women or men. I care if they're good. (Ian, employer)

The idea that, if you are any good as a screenwriter, your talent will eventually be 'discovered' and success will follow, is firmly entrenched in the film industry, as in other creative industries (see for example Nixon, 2003 on the advertising industry and Taylor and Littleton, 2012 on the art world).

...you could be an absolute outsider, think about whatshername, you know famously the woman who got an Academy Award and had been a prostitute in her last job. Cody Diablo. She is an amazing good writer. Wrote an amazing script and it got made. Who cares what she did before? (Pete, employer)

Taylor and Littleton call this the 'big break' narrative (Taylor and Littleton, 2012), and demonstrate that from the creative worker's point of view it functions to validate their continued commitment to their chosen career, even if they've had little success. I also see it as drawing on a wider discourse, firmly established and available to be used, that the recognition of artistic ability is purely meritocratic. The employers I spoke to expressed confidence in their systems for finding writers and their own ability to judge screenwriters' work:

If there were women, they would be in the room. That's what I think. If I looked at a sample and it was good enough they would be there. (Gillian, employer)

The quality of writing, that's probably the best way to put it, the quality of writing and writer is the most important factor. (Ian, employer)

They were also able to draw on notions of the free market as an argument against introducing conscious measures to redress the imbalance, suggesting that it is the audiences, not the employers (producers, financiers), who ultimately dictate what films get made:

I don't think there will ever be a really self-conscious 'oh we really, really need to be favouring...' you know, I don't think we'll get to a point, because there's a commercial imperative, so I don't think there will ever be a place of active, positive discrimination. (Nick, employer)

There's a side of me that also feels very irritated by people who say there should be more women, there should be 50/50, because for me it has to be ultimately based on merit. (Eloise, employer)

In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, this continued assertion of meritocracy in the film industry is a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) which reinforces the dominance of white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied individuals, in a way that is accepted and seen as both natural and legitimate, even by those whose interests are not served. Indeed, some of my participants articulated their discomfort with the notion that there is any discrimination in their industry:

I can't imagine for one second that women would be discriminated against because they are women if they come up with a great story. (Eloise, employer)

I suppose what I think is that less women set out to do it. I cannot believe that they are less good. So I believe if there were the same amount doing it they would be getting the same commissions. (Laura, employer)

I hate to think it's the industry that's prejudiced. I don't feel as a woman that I'm never employed because I'm a woman. I've never felt that, ever. Maybe I'm sometimes employed because I'm a woman. You know, maybe (Producer) would rather have a girl assistant because I'll look after him more. Make him tea without grumbling. (Pippa, employer)

As that last example indicates, it was repeatedly suggested to me that it was in fact men who had the disadvantage; particularly in a culture where it is believed there was evidence of positive discrimination:

A lot of them got picked up because people were desperate to find people who ticked all the boxes 'oh god yes we've found a woman, and she's black and she's a lesbian and she can write' - or direct or whatever it was. Fantastic! (Freddie, screenwriter)

Natalie: Do you think it would have made any difference to your career if you were female?

Tony: Er - at the beginning I think it would have helped it.

Natalie: Why do you think that?

Tony: Because start of careers usually involves backing from government, or it used to.

Howard Becker argues that it is simply implausible to believe that all possible candidates can “come to the attention of ‘everyone whose opinion affects the formation of reputations’” (Becker, 1982). From this Taylor and Littleton deduce that it is important to consider what methods prevail for gaining the attention of significant decision makers and opinion formers (Taylor and Littleton, 2012), as I will be considering in some length in the next chapter.

More critically for this chapter’s analysis of how the work of screenwriters is understood by the film industry, these discourses of meritocracy and individual creative ability fail to recognize the social, educational and environmental dimensions of creative work (Amabile, 1983), let alone how these might disadvantage women screenwriters. It assumes an equal playing field for all who wish to enter. Richard Florida argues, “by papering over the causes of cultural and educational advantage, meritocracy may subtly perpetuate the very prejudices it claims to renounce.” (Florida, 2004, p.78). In the next section I will consider how my participants discussed their working practices and relationships in a way that reinforces Becker’s argument about creative work emerging from collaboration rather than being an inherent quality of an individual and, crucially, how a better understanding of this could point the way to finding the women who might be missing from the screenwriting profession.

4.2. Alternative discourses in the talk of screenwriters and their employers.

In this section, I will explore contrasting - but equally commonly held - perceptions about screenwriting work. These discourses do not appear to be recognized by those that use them, even though similar repeated patterns can be identified across many participants. Indeed, these alternative discourses can be used to challenge those shown in 4.1 since they are just as frequently utilized by the UK film workers. While participants talked about individual creative genius, they also discussed the importance of collaboration. Without

questioning the meritocratic nature of the film industry they also revealed a pervasive tendency of people to work with others who were most ‘like’ them. The importance of this analysis section therefore, is in disrupting and problematizing the accepted discourses that have been shown to function to uphold gender inequality. These counter discourses reveal ideological dilemmas (Billig et al, 1988) in my participants’ talk, opening up the possibility of different understandings of screenwriting work and, more importantly, broadening the possible subject positions available for individuals to take up as screenwriters.

4.2.1 Creativity and collaboration.

It was universally accepted by my participants that screenwriters must work in collaboration with others such as script editors, producers and directors, accepting comments and criticisms of their writing as part of the job:

...if you’re a writer specifically, as opposed to a writer/director, um, you have to roll with the punches you have to be flexible and adaptable in the development of a project. (Nick, employer)

So keeping your own spirits up when you’re constantly being told ‘do this’ ‘do that’, or what have you ‘oh no, no change that’, ‘oh no we don’t like that’ or ‘we don’t like this’. And you can go into a meeting one day and be told we need a table, you go away and write the table and you bring it back and they say ‘oh no we asked for a biscuit’ and you say ‘oh no you asked for a table’ and they say ‘I don’t think we did’ and so I think that’s tricky. (Catherine, screenwriter)

They must navigate conflicting job requirements such as being able to generate confidence in their skills and ‘vision’ for a new project whilst being able to accommodate the opinions and objectives of others. A growing body of work, following Becker, and particularly in Social Psychology, is successfully demonstrating the limitations of an understanding of creativity as a personality trait of certain individuals (see in particular Amabile, 1983, John-Steiner, 2000, Taylor and Littleton, 2012). Teresa Amabile contends that anyone can be creative to a greater or lesser extent, although not everyone’s output may be recognized as ‘historically significant’ (Amabile 1983, p.361). I will return to a discussion of how and by whom works are deemed culturally important and worthwhile in Chapter Seven but in this section, I want

to further explore the discourse of collaboration, and examine how it serves as a contrast to the idea of a special creative individual. Amabile's work suggests that assigning creative status to certain people may indeed be a way of obscuring social inequalities. Similarly, in direct opposition to the discourse of the exceptional individual, Taylor and Littleton argue that "creative activity is collaborative, emerging from the interactions and relationships between people" (Taylor and Littleton, 2012, p.11), and they do not assume that creativity is something 'real' or discoverable.

Collaboration is widely recognized as a key dimension of film production (Conor, 2014) and was accepted by my screenwriter participants as a necessary and even appealing part of their job:

...you're writing drama for people to act out and for a lot of other people to collaborate on and I think that's the part of writing that's always excited me, so I can't imagine myself ever writing a novel for example, because I think I'd find it quite lonely. (Natasha, screenwriter)

It's exciting when you're collaborating and being creative and yeah. (Usma, screenwriter)

I love that feeling, there's a small group of people, the producer, the director, me, or maybe two producers, the director, me and we're all working together on the project, I love that feeling. (Robert, screenwriter)

Indeed, the employers, despite their reliance on the notion of a creative individual, all recognized collaboration as an important part of a screenwriter's job:

...in film particularly it's a very collaborative process and - there aren't many auteurs out there (Nick, employer)

But what's really interesting is that even the really high level of writers do want to collaborate. (Ian, employer)

There was talk of how tricky it can be to find the right person to collaborate with, which also reveals how important it is regarded to find the right collaborator. For example:

I think you can't be the kind of writer who likes high concepts and big films or slightly quirky but still all about the entertainment and then you've got a producer who wants to make 'Fish Tank'²⁴. It's not going to work. (Emily, screenwriter)

²⁴ 'Fish Tank' is a multiple-award winning, low budget coming of age story written and directed by British filmmaker Andrea Arnold (*Fish Tank*, 2009. Directed by ARNOLD, A. Screenwriter: Andrea Arnold: IFC Films.)

Screenwriting may take more because – I believe it’s like meeting the person you’re going to marry. You have to find the person, the company or people who ‘get’ what you’re trying to do in that script, get it and see the audience for it. (Rob, employer)

Rachel also expressed how the collaborative nature of film could result in complications around authorship and credit:

..that can be a strange experience when you see your director being interviewed about how they had this idea and why they made these decisions and so on and well, they didn’t! (laughs) they weren’t there! (Rachel, screenwriter)

Collaboration was presented as a process that doesn’t always result in positive outcomes for everyone involved.

On the other hand it’s very difficult because you may have an absolutely delightful relationship with the writer who’s become a very good friend and it’s incredibly awkward and probably we’re not quite as good when it’s appropriate at firing the writer and moving on. (Pete, employer)

I like writers who respond to things I’m saying, I work with some writers who, for different reasons, don’t like to contribute much in a room, and sort of stare slightly blankly, which, well it really pisses you off, because you’re giving feedback on the work and they just look at you. (Frank, employer)

However, neither Pete nor Frank’s comments suggest that this in any way diminishes the importance of collaboration. Indeed, the dominant attitude to collaboration amongst my participants was a positive one, with recognition of the results as seen in successful teams working across multiple projects:

Clearly between Danny Boyle and Frank Cottrell Boyce there was an affinity. Clearly different forces at play because I would argue Danny is a lot more linear and likes more tangible things whereas Frank Cottrell Boyce likes to go off at a tangent but there was an affinity in terms of the tone they were going for and the vibe they were going for. (Eloise, employer)

Yeah, which is why you understand why people like David O. Russell, they find a team of people, a team of actors, a team of producers and they stick with those people because it works and to everybody else it seems like elitism but to people in the industry you know it’s because they’ve found the magic formula where everyone gets on and everyone can argue and scream at each other and still come away with something that everyone’s happy with at the end. (Tessa, screenwriter)

The ideological dilemma exposed by these two conflicting discourses of the creative individual and the power of successful collaborating indicates that some roles are viewed as more significant than others. Within collaboration, some work is considered to be “requiring the special gift or sensibility of an artist” (Becker, 1974). In the film world, at least, it would seem that this is often gendered in a way that roles held predominantly by women are not

recognized as quite as creative nor are the individuals that hold those positions regarded as being as special as the men they work with:

You know the producer is the enabler; you're the really nice to everyone who gets the best work out of people. But having been doing it for twenty years, you know I'm fucking fed up with these men. I make men look good. That's what I do. (Nicola, employer)

There's lots of female producers. I think that could be neck and neck. I think we're seen as people who care. You know, I think the stereotype also works for us, favours us in terms of 'they'll get it done' and 'they can multitask' and 'charming' and sort of things 'connected', 'might know that person', 'maybe sleeping with the director'. (Vicky, employer)

Even though these discourses exist in competition with each other, they seem to map onto constructions of what work is considered more special, and these constructions themselves appear to be gendered. In order to illustrate this, I would like now to consider the role of the development executive in the screenwriting process.

4.2.2. 'Collaborwriting': When does collaboration become co-creation?

Heads of Development, Development Executives, Script Editors and Story Editors are all employed predominantly to work with the screenwriter developing their script over many drafts to improve it and support the screenwriting process. Those with 'Development' in their job title tend to work across several projects for one company and be in more permanent employment or longer contracts than script editors, story editors and script consultants who are generally freelance and often seen as having lower status. They will work with or for a producer, who also frequently plays a role in the discussions about the screenplay, but often have a closer relationship with the screenwriter due to the producers' other responsibilities. The role is heavily gendered, as acknowledged by my participants:

And developers. I mean what about the whole 'D-girl' thing? That's what they call it in America don't they? Which is hideous. (Gillian, employer)

...most script editors are young women and quite a lot of male TV writers end up married to script editors (Usma, screenwriter)

Leidner argues that "When jobholders are all of one gender, it appears that people of that gender must be especially well suited to the work, even if at other times and places, the other

gender does the same work (Leidner, 1991, p.155). Developing was often regarded as a nurturing role and as such was seen as a natural fit for women:

Women tend to be quite good at nurturing. If you're interested in writing and you're not a writer yourself or you're interested in writing but you might be more prone to be in positions where you can be an editor, where you can be a development person, you can help people find their vision. (Eloise, employer)

Is there a nurturing aspect to this development side and women can feel drawn to that? Nursing a baby through production. I've had such good notes from development executives, I've often wondered why they aren't writing. They're so good. Why aren't they writing scripts? It's a question you might direct to them. (Jack, screenwriter)

It is easy to see from these examples that development is being closely associated with writing, but is not considered to be actual writing. However, Emma, who had previously worked for many years in a development role before becoming a screenwriter, articulates that it is often difficult to pinpoint exactly who is responsible for what:

Well I've always come up with ideas and always given those ideas away to screenwriters. (Emma, screenwriter)

This observation is backed up by one of the male employers, echoing Rachel's comment about directors and creative authorship above:

And what's really funny is, I've heard (male screenwriter and director) say lots of times how he came up with the ending and I think "oh yeah? That was the (female) development executive that came up with that'!" (Pete, employer)

Nick, a male employer working in a senior development role - who was also attempting screenwriting in his spare time - referred to the development process as "collaborwriting", taking the idea of the collaborative relationship to a different level. Indeed, of my participants, eleven of the twenty employers admitted that they had either considered or were actively attempting some screenwriting, and of those who said they had not, two of the women said they would consider other forms of writing. In addition, four of the screenwriters I spoke to had previously worked in development roles. It is not hard, therefore, to see that there is a close relationship between the work of screenwriters and those who work with screenwriters in development. Although clearly the assigned 'screenwriter' will most likely be the person who sits at a keyboard and types words onto a page, it is worth considering why

this person is more often male than female. Throughout my conversations a lack of confidence was repeatedly suggested as a key reason why women might not put themselves forward as screenwriters as frequently as men:

Women are more self-doubting (Lance, screenwriter)

My understanding is that women respond to rejection less well than men respond to it and quite often don't pursue their careers. (Frank, employer)

I don't know whether it's true but I think women do sometimes need a support network round them and I think that's why women theatre writers do well because they come out of those new writer schemes and you see them on Twitter they're all friends with each other, they're very supportive of each other and give each other a lot of comfort and read each other's scripts, that sort of stuff, back each other up. (Kate, employer)

Although this is treating women as though they are all the same and appears to be once again individualizing the problem, some of the female screenwriters were able to articulate a sense that women might face different challenges than men:

I think men are, just because at school they're encouraged to come out and be counted. Girls are taught to think before they speak. I think it's a lot to do with how you look. Girls don't want to look stupid and I think boys don't care about looking stupid generally. (Emily, screenwriter)

So if you were a young woman who was passionate about film and you want to be a filmmaker, you would have to be so passionate to cope with the genuine hostility that you're likely to meet until you prove yourself. (Hannah, screenwriter)

These women have had a degree of success securing paid screenwriting work, and yet recognise that girls are socialized to put themselves forward less impulsively than men. Hannah was one of a few that spoke about open "hostility" from men whilst at work, and indicates why women may have good reason for not pushing themselves forward.

I contend that this challenge to the 'special creative individual' highlighted by the discourse of creative collaboration, may provide a clue to where at least some of the missing female screenwriters might be found (see Chapter Three). Gendered expectations and a lack of role models might lead women who may otherwise consider a career as a screenwriter to take jobs in development working with writers as a way to be part of the screenwriting process without having to identify themselves as the special creative individual, "being judged and exposed" as Eloise suggested above, in the process. Female participants who had

been - or still were - in development roles, reflected on their lack of encouragement or suitability to take up creative roles:

I think about directors and I've stood next to directors and thought 'fucking hell I could do that!' but nobody said to me, and I went to St. Paul's and Oxford, which is the pushiest schooling you can have but no one really said to me – 'hold on, but you could be a director. You could do that'. (Nicola, employer)

I think I struggle cos I think I'm not very creative. So that's why I wouldn't write. I wouldn't dare because I think I'm not creative. Now maybe that's a message I've had? As a woman? Do other women feel like that? I don't know. But I definitely feel I'm not creative. I'm really good at telling you what works and doesn't work, you know, absolutely. (Gillian, employer)

Although there is some fluidity between roles in the industry, most of those who make it from a supportive role in development to a successful career as a screenwriter are male. In an observation that echoes recent discussions of the apparent ease with which male film directors move from independent films to big budget studio pictures (Silverstein, 2014), Emma describes a gendered aspect to successful movement from script editor to script writer:

When I look at people who have crossed over from my world, from the development world: (Screenwriter), Okay? The guy who used to work for (film financier) who's now he's writing (film script), he was script editor on (film script)...(Screenwriter/director) you know was at (production company) for a long time - All men. - They get big commissions; they are completely embraced by the industry. (Emma, screenwriter)

This of course suggests that simply recognizing development roles as creative is not the whole solution, since it is likely to lead to more male development personnel getting screenwriting work but less so women. However, it is further evidence that the screenwriting role has become very gendered.

Continued reliance on the discourse of the identifiable creative individual is to deny the importance of collaboration and indeed 'other people' in creating well-received screenplays. If screenplays emerge, not from the unique imagination of one person, but through the work of creative teams, it might suggest that there are more potential screenwriters than can be recognized by the 'creative individual' criteria, and this raises questions about why they are not finding access to work or success.

4.2.2 Homophily in the creative process.

My research participants worked hard to suggest that successful collaborations are found through some kind of intangible, elusive and often unpredictable process, as with Tessa's suggestion that "they've found the magic formula" in the quotation above ('magic' was indeed repeatedly evoked in my conversations, hence the title of this chapter which is a quote from one of the male screenwriters). This echoes the meritocratic discourse that allows those working in the film industry to believe that their processes are fair and open. However, on analysis of the interviews, it became apparent that collaboration was often happening along the lines of homophily. Homophily is the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others (Ibarra, 1992).

Natalie: What makes for a good working relationship?

Paul: Shared sensibility. For starters. I think. (Paul, employer)

The similarity of partners in creative collaboration could be found along the lines of class, age, background, race and gender. Here is Eloise, talking about working with screenwriters who are in the same age bracket as herself:

By and large I realize I feel more comfortable personally with my peers or younger because I feel you can be a lot more yourself, you know you can say exactly what you want. You are the same generation. You are the same level roughly so there's no sort of tension. (Eloise, employer)

Esther is a black screenwriter who was born in the UK but educated in Jamaica. She was given her first job as a screenwriter by a British production company run by a successful black actor. She expressed her difficulty finding people who understood her cultural references and background:

One of the biggest frustrations for me on jobs that aren't going right is that we don't have a common language to talk about a piece. (Esther, screenwriter)

Hannah found both her class and gender to be an issue when finding collaborators:

...when you're meeting some Exec, that you just know, they might be the same gender but you know they are a different class and you're trying to joyfully express your idea and you can see them going 'ooh that sounds so tacky'. (Hannah, screenwriter)

Since my sample was weighted to include a much higher percentage of women than are found in the industry, my data includes many examples of women working productively with other women. Here are a few examples:

All three of my feature films were directed by women. All three produced by women. (Catherine, screenwriter)

I'm pretty sure that the fact that she could rely on my instincts, coming from a similar – we're not, we don't have a similar background or anything but the fact that we both have a female sensibility and the same idea about what sort of risks we wanted to take with the material (Jo, employer)

...she's a story editor if you like and she talks to me and we discuss plot points and things, and my first assistant director is a woman and we three girls, we are so safe with each other, we are so secure with each other, and it's so creative. (Hannah, screenwriter)

I think I've been drawn to working with the female directors I've worked with because I got the impression that they would be more collaborative and it would be a more equal partnership and I wouldn't be subjected to someone who thought that they were right all the time. (Natasha, screenwriter)

But with men continuing to far outnumber women as producers, executive producers and directors of films (Lauzen, 2014), and whilst the number for BAME are even lower (Creative Skillset, 2010a), the reality is that women and BAME men are likely to have a tougher time finding productive collaborative relationships in the film industry.

Certainly there was talk of these difficulties in my conversations with female screenwriters:

I really dream of finding that magic partnership, like a director always works with a certain writer or something and you understand why directors try and write because trying to get that relationship is really, really difficult. (Tessa, screenwriter)

I don't have a relationship with a director like that and I wish I did. (Catherine, screenwriter)

Although none of them appeared to have considered that their gender might have been a factor in this, some of the female participants talked about difficulties they had experienced working in creative collaboration with men:

I definitely know that many of the men I've worked with would have been more comfortable with a guy that they could lad around with and probably feel like they have to be a bit more on their best behaviour with a woman. (Usma, screenwriter)

Emily expressed frustration when discussing female characters with male collaborators such as directors and producers:

Of course, once we get onto the female roles and I'm going 'no, no, no, she wouldn't say that' and they're going 'why not, but that's my fantasy woman' and I'm saying 'but that's really disgusting and I'm not going to put it in my script' (Emily, screenwriter)

Gillian recalled an experience with a male screenwriter who ignored her throughout a meeting, despite the fact that she was the person who had invited him to come onto the project, and indeed despite her potential power to refuse him employment:

That's something I was really surprised at and I'll come out and say 'did you notice how he just talked to you all the time?' And now I've got a bit of a thing with this guy. I'm like, is he going to do that again? You know, and he didn't do it the second time. But I really felt he did the first meeting it was really bizarre and it almost put me off. I could have said 'no, we're not having him.' (Gillian, employer)

Similarly, Vicky, a black British producer, expressed a sense of being unlike those she had gone to for film finance, and suggested that some of her competitors may have an advantage that she didn't:

Yeah right 'tennis on Friday? Golf?' I'm not that world. I don't want to play tennis and golf with you. I want you to fund my film because you like it and you think it's going to make you money! (Vicky, employer)

Indeed, the interviews were peppered with references to the very sociable nature of the film business, which perhaps helps explain the strongly felt need for homophily in creative collaborative work. Jo tries to explain usefulness of informality when building a creative relationship:

It can be pretty hard at the beginning when you don't really know somebody and both sides are finding their way and the relationship can feel quite formal and actually it's a really informal relationship and it's not best served by a formal structure. It's better served by being able to relax with somebody and chat over a cup of coffee (Jo, employer)

And Vicky suggests that this provides a good approach even once the work is underway:

I'm checking in. I'm checking in without checking if you know what I mean. I'm not saying 'So, tell me what the character said today. Are you actually writing? Are you actually working?' It's more of the level 'How's it going? Do you want to have coffee?' and keeping that relationship going. 'You know you can talk to me if you want. You know I'm here to problem-solve. You know this is a project we're doing together.' (Vicky, employer)

Vanessa articulates why the film industry might be particularly susceptible to reliance on personal relationships as much as skills or experience:

I guess it's a lot about communication and personality, you know, making film is really hard, and so if you set out on that journey with somebody who you just don't quite get on with, or who is difficult to deal with, then it can make it so much more painful. (Vanessa, employer)

But whilst these may be genuine concerns for those working in the industry, creative homophily serves to uphold existing inequalities and raises questions about why there appears to be a common belief that we can socialize and work better with those who are more like us along gender, race, age and other lines. The most recurrent answer that male and female screenwriters gave to my question "What makes for a good working relationship with directors, producers and other collaborators?" was "respect". Here, one employer talks about fixing a script that has 'gone wrong' by bringing in a script editor to collaborate with the writer:

It's a fuck up and what we've done is we've given, we've strongly recommended that they need to get a script editor in the mix. We've recommended someone who is old school, who is the same age as the writer, because the writer is of a certain age and stature, and you know, there'll be respect and they actually it transpires, they knew each other twenty years ago. (Martha, employer)

Interestingly, Martha's example also illustrates how reliance on homophily might uphold the status quo by the fact that her writer and script editor already knew each other. However, the answer seems to be more complex for gender and race. A few female screenwriters suggested that the spectre of sex (always depicted as heteronormative) presented problems:

...you know when you're starting to work on projects, you know, guys, into your 30s most people have a partner or are married so it's easier for guys to hang out with other guys than it is to hang out with other women, in the evening or going on trips. (Frankie, screenwriter)

But I was really conscious that in order for us to be, you know, I would spend many hours alone in a room with one man working on a film and it would not be comfortable for either of us if sex was an issue for us. So I went to considerable lengths to not make that an issue and be - not exactly be one of the blokes, I didn't exactly hang around swearing and drinking beer and so on but I definitely didn't dress in any way that could be sexy or attractive or anything like that. I dressed in a plain, non-descript, it doesn't matter who I am sort of way. (Rachel, screenwriter)

Another male writer friend of mine ended up in this very intense intellectual collaboration with his script editor and was sort of wondering if he was really in love with her and he were all going 'no, no, no, you're not in love with her, you're married, you've got two kids' but you can see that dynamic and it's very exciting for both parties but you can't have that with a, that's not going to happen with two women. (Usma, screenwriter)

Sean Nixon has shown how all male creative partnerships in advertising diffuse the homoerotic associations of such a close form of creative collaboration (Nixon, 2003). His

study indicates that around eighty per cent of creative teams were all male, and the relationship between the art directors and copywriters was often referred to, even by the men themselves, as a marriage. This was deemed fitting because of the long hours working together and the sense of a long-lasting commitment, which relied on trust and teamwork. However, Sean Nixon also demonstrates that:

...comparing the partnerships to an intimate relationship like marriage, journalists and practitioners were able to both give public expression to these homosocial desires, while diffusing the homoerotic associations of this intimacy by routing it through a heterosexual form...and fixing their identities (in the case of the practitioners) as robustly heterosexual. (Nixon, 2003, p.118).

My data clearly resonate with Sean Nixon's findings, but his argument is that male creative 'marriages' are less about being uncomfortable with women in the creative partnerships because of the spectre of sex, but indeed a way of justifying, or accounting for, their absence. Therefore questions still stand as to why the intimacy of creative collaboration still works to exclude women. One answer found within the discourse of creative homophily was the considerable evidence of a perception that men and women are not interested in the same projects and so more naturally work with those of the same gender:

(Female screenwriter) is writing (film title) so - you know, and that's got a female director and it's a female-driven project and that's, that's a good fit there, (Nick, employer)

It would make sense, wouldn't it? If most directors are men, they respond to - loosely - male themed stories. (Paul, employer)

I will return to a detailed examination of this notion of gendered tastes in Chapter Seven. For now it seems clear to suggest that creative homophily is widely understood by the UK film industry as a path to successful collaboration, and since the numbers of women and BAME in the industry are far less than white men, it is very likely that a view of the industry as a meritocracy may not be entirely well founded. Even though the discourses of collaboration and homophily seem to challenge the seemingly contradictory discourses of the talented individual and meritocracy, they fail to acknowledge that collaboration is valued less than creativity, and that homophily works to disadvantage women and minorities in the film

industry. Some discourses seem more dominant and in the final section of this chapter I examine the possible reasons for this.

4.3. “It’s getting better”: Why certain discourses are more acknowledged by the UK film industry than others.

Some discourses appear to be more consciously utilized by the film industry, and I discuss here what rhetorical function this provides for speakers. Why is the idea of a special individual repeatedly drawn upon in spite of a contrasting dialogue available on creative collaboration? Why is the industry understood as a meritocracy and not as a search for compatible collaborators? To answer this I will now turn to the work done by another discourse that suggests gender inequality is no longer a concern, is on it’s way to being solved, and is certainly ‘getting better’.

I expect it not to stay the same for very long (Yvonne, employer)

Certainly for me I think things have shifted in the last few years. (Frank, employer)

I think it is changing. That would be my argument for you. (Vanessa, employer)

These are just some of the examples from my fieldwork where participants tried to suggest that gender inequality in the UK film industry was no longer an issue. This is a common discourse, found particularly in feminist research (see e.g. Edley and Wetherell, 2001, Kelan, 2009, Scharff, 2012), Many of my male employer participants were keen to name-check female screenwriters that they were either working with, or desired to work with in the future, and to present themselves as having either no bias, or a bias towards women screenwriters.

I have a slight prejudice myself, which is generally speaking I prefer working with women and generally speaking I prefer women. (Pete, employer)

If I was to try to find the top thirty screenwriters in the UK that we wanted to make a film with, I’d be surprised, well I don’t think it would be as low as 25%, I think it would be - perhaps 40%? (Ian, employer)

We’re probably working with more female writers than we are male writers at the moment. (Nick, employer)

Nick works for a large production company and said they have “about 50 projects on the British slate and that’s supplemented by say 20 on the American slate”. Even allowing for some writers to be working across more than one script that is still a huge number of female screenwriters for one company to be working with given the numbers in employment each year. In our conversation he only mentioned five female screenwriters, and all of them after I asked specifically about gender. He voluntarily mentioned twelve male writers by name throughout the interview. Indeed, throughout all my interviews I repeatedly heard the same five or six female screenwriters’ names, those who were currently in high demand. Mentioning these women accomplishes a rhetorical function of giving the impression that equality has been achieved. My data allow a wider inspection of the patterned nature of this practice, and by noting the same handful of names being repeated across my data, demonstrates how tokenistic this is in reality. Geena Davis, who has campaigned for many years for gender equality in film and television, argues that there is data to show that men tend to overestimate the percentage of women:

In a group if there’s 17 per cent women, men think it’s balanced. If there’s 33 per cent women, they think there’s more women than men. (Geena Davis, quoted in Rosenberg 2013)

There were discursive attempts by some employers to provide a reason for the perceived increase in women:

What I’ve been encouraged by really is there are a lot of interesting female playwrights coming through and starting to move into screenwriting and you feel like ‘ooh, okay’. I do definitely feel like something’s shifted in the last few years. (Vanessa, employer)

I think again, one of the great things about our team at the moment is that we are very aware of gender issues and it’s the make up of the team, we take it very seriously, we question it, and that’s therefore it is a vivid part of our conversations. (Martha, employer)

Others suggested that even though there are only a few examples so far, this would encourage other women to follow in their footsteps:

And you imagine the more female screenwriters there are or the more female playwrights or people writing for the first time are going to think oh yeah- (Robert, screenwriter)

If you had two times Jane Goldman, writing what she’s writing, genre films, very well, one or two of them become successful, that would also act as inspiration to other people, who would think ‘I can do it as well’ (Rob, employer)

This suggests that the lack of female screenwriters is the problem of individual women who are not putting themselves forward in sufficient numbers, a belief echoed more bluntly by some:

I think it's up to women. I think it's up to them to get off their arses and make a film rather than go 'oh my god, woe is me, it's not fair, it's all really prejudiced, we should have this opportunity'. Why not work your butt off, get good, do what you need to do to get good. (Pippa, employer)

As we saw in Chapter One, data gathered annually by the Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University shows variations year by year in the percentage of women in key creative positions on feature films, but little change overall. Why then, do those within the industry suggest that there are noticeable improvements? While a narrative of progress is not exclusive to the film industry, it has been shown to be common in discussions of gender inequality (Everingham et al., 2007). In post-feminist contexts equal opportunities policies are often described in gender-neutral terms as if gender inequality were a thing of the past, thus masking the persistence of discrimination and inequality (Liff and Cameron, 1997). However, more than that, such disavowing on the part of screenwriters' employers allows them to ignore the need for change, or question their own contribution to the problem of gender inequality. Whilst those in a position to employ screenwriters interpret the presence of a few female screenwriters in current employment as representing an end to inequality they may overlook the evidence that might lead to change.

4.4. Conclusion.

As I said in Chapter One, in the last few years there has been an unprecedented upsurge in interest in the subject of gender equality in film, everything from on-screen representation (Butterly, 2014) to who is working creatively behind the camera (Rosser, 2014), and from sexist red carpet questions (Ninias, 2015) to who gets recognized with award

nominations (Karlin, 2015). Despite this, there is still no evidence that the level of participation by women in key creative roles such as screenwriting is improving. Indeed, it's possible that all the public noise about gender equality adds fuel to the flames of the 'it's getting better' discourse, as everyone assumes someone else is solving the problem and creative females working in film enjoy enhanced publicity. In this chapter I have highlighted three discourses that are consciously drawn upon by film workers – the special creative individual, meritocracy and things are getting better. They serve to justify the continued gender imbalance, and to allow those in a position to change the situation to do nothing. It is a strong indication of why the statistics are not changing year after year. By continuing to utilize these three discourses, without acknowledging the presence of other equally persuasive discourses around creative collaboration and homophily, workers in the UK film industry reinforce perceptions of screenwriting labour that allow the continued predominance of wealthy white men to be seen as unproblematic. The very existence of contradictory discourses opens up possibilities of questioning the absolute nature of the entrenched beliefs about screenwriting labour. All five of these discourses are available to and drawn on by my participants, suggesting tensions exist in the way that screenwriting labour is understood by those most familiar with it. My research also exposes the gendered nature of the ideological dilemmas revealed by the contradictions. The special creative individual is recognized through characteristics that make it harder for women to take up that subject position. That collaboration is less recognized as an essential creative element results in certain roles predominantly held by women to be devalued as less creative. The failure to recognize the role of homophily in creative work disadvantages both women and other minority communities, who are subtly othered through talk of meritocracy (something I will return to in more detail in the final analysis chapter).

The discourses that I have discussed in this chapter clearly show the persistence of shared understandings of screenwriting work that suit some people more than others. They are not explicitly sexist, but still fulfil the rhetorical function of justifying inequalities. My analysis of them in this chapter contributes to Ros Gill's (2014) call for more nuanced vocabularies of critique. They can therefore be recognized as having real outcomes for women seeking employment as screenwriters. By highlighting some of the more informal and subtle ways in which inequalities are discursively legitimized I have demonstrated some of the ways that gender inequality is upheld in the UK film industry. In the next chapter I will explore how the informal recruitment practices that screenwriters are subject to make it more difficult for women to occupy the role.

5. EXPLORING THE GENDERED DYNAMICS OF INFORMAL RECRUITMENT PRACTICES IN THE UK FILM INDUSTRY.

Nobody is sexist, how could you be? (Nicola, employer)

The film industry is not a new creative industry, but it offers an exemplary case study for how ‘insecure, casualized or irregular labour’ (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p.2) has widely replaced integrated, almost factory-like industrial production (see for example: Christopherson, 2008, Florida, 2004). As discussed in Chapter One, most film workers fit a ‘flexible specialization’ model (Christopherson and Storper, 1988, Storper and Christopherson, 1987) – that is, they are employed on a freelance basis, applying their own particular specialization across a range of projects and often across different media. A career in film, in as much as it can still be called that, shares the characteristics of other creative labour. It is precarious, discontinuous, and the labour is ‘deterritorialized, dispersed and decentralized’ (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p.7). This chapter contributes to the small but growing body of research on gender inequality in creative professions by exploring the dynamics of informal and networked recruitment processes. It is informed by key thinking from the fields of creative industries, cultural studies and gender and work, but by introducing new empirical data from interviews with screenwriters and their employers, I am able to trace some of the ways that inequality of opportunity is sustained through structural and subjective mechanisms that are not held accountable through equal opportunities policies (Bielby, 2009, Jones and Pringle, 2015).

Even among the creative industries, film is exceptional in its reliance on networking and word of mouth as its primary – and in many cases only – tool for recruitment and for identifying the ‘right’ candidate for the job (Blair, 2000a). Creative work such as filmmaking is a high-risk, speculative endeavour (Hesmondhalgh, 2007), where the product is often made before it is clear who the audience is, how large that audience is, and indeed whether profit will be possible for the product at all (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). Within this context,

judgments are made about which projects are worth pursuing and which individuals are worth employing. There is a culture of uncertainty, subjectivity and reliance on other people's opinions as a safety net for getting it wrong.

Arguably linked to these dynamics, the film industry is notoriously hard to break into (Randle and Culkin, 2009). Like so many creative industries, the film industry utilizes recruitment procedures that rely on 'connections' and 'affinities of habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984). Traditional formal recruitment practices, such as job advertisements, requests for recognized qualifications and interview panels are less frequently used, particularly for what are viewed as the most key creative positions, such as the screenwriter. As we saw in the previous chapter, creative work like screenwriting is frequently viewed within the UK film industry as an innate quality of a special individual, a mysterious and unquantifiable talent which some even referred to as being like magic. Such ambiguity surrounding requisite characteristics and skills makes for difficulty in identifying capable screenwriting candidates and leads to employers relying on alternative methods to make their selection.

It's a delicate one though to know how hard they're writing and how competent they are. And sometimes it's very difficult to know that. How talented are they? (Paul, employer)

As this chapter will demonstrate, formal qualifications have limited use for screenwriters. Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the perceived distinction between 'the gentleman' and 'the scholar' (Bourdieu, 1984), and upper class dismissal of middle class attempts to educate themselves to a better status, is useful in understanding the UK film industry's judgment of those with formal screenwriting qualifications. Bourdieu observed that the teaching of art was "a contradiction in terms for some, who hold that beauty is neither taught nor learnt but is a grace transmitted from invested masters to predestined disciples." This is problematic when the majority of those who are apparently 'predestined' are white, wealthy and male (Rogers, 2007).

In the UK film industry, the dominant discourse is that if you have to be taught it, you obviously don't 'have it'.

I don't really believe in the 'you teach structure in these ways'. I think it is something innate, apart from just understanding stories and how they work and then also being able to analyse your own stories. (Kate, employer)

I think structure is an art that you can learn or you can be helped with, you know I could structure, as you could, you've worked in it so much, it's quite easy to put the building blocks in place in a sense, but I think the actual talent is writing character and dialogue that is believable and moving and doesn't feel on the nose and clumsy. (Nicola, employer)

What makes a person creative? I don't know. I think you've either got it or you don't in some ways. I read something the other day that made me think and it was somebody talking about modern art and art schools and saying the problem with art schools now is that they don't teach you the thing that they could teach you which is form, and they try and teach you the thing that they can't teach you which is how to have ideas. (Patrick, screenwriter)

Apparent in these examples from my participants is an ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988) - a tension between whether some aspects of screenwriting, and indeed which aspects, it might be possible to learn. More critically, there is a gap between these possible learnable elements and the more intangible talent demonstratives. So, a script may be well written, but the idea is not considered good enough. The story structure might fit the traditional film model but the writer is judged as demonstrating insufficient insight into human behaviour. This discourse of innate talent promotes the apparently natural ability of those who apparently do have 'it'. In the case of screenwriting, 'it' would likely be considered to be creativity and writing ability. Recognition of these attributes is dependent on more nebulous and subjective criteria that apparently cannot be measured. If unable to gain this subjective recognition of their ability or ideas, aspirant screenwriters are also unable to prove themselves through the acquisition of qualifications either, which helps to preserve the status of those judged as having the right ability. In the case of screenwriting therefore, it is particularly important to unpack the way that these subjective assessments happen, and to identify any potential sites where inequalities may be reinforced.

Sarah Fenstermaker, Candace West and Don Zimmerman argue that to overcome gender inequality 'we will need to understand the mechanisms by which it is sustained in

institutional social arrangements' (Fenstermaker et al., 2002: 38). This chapter will unpack how informal recruitment procedures can contribute to gender inequality in screenwriting work. I will start by analysing the way my participants talk about how they got that first elusive job in the film industry. I will outline prevalent recruitment practices that can be identified in repeated patterns throughout their discussions, identify some key areas where women may face disadvantages, and highlight some of the gendered experiences of my participants. In the second section, I will look at the consequences of an employment market based predominantly on networking and demonstrate how my research sheds light on the precise ways in which networking for work has gendered outcomes. I will also explore how my participants talk about these practices and inequalities more generally, and how they are navigated and understood by those working in the UK film industry.

5.1 Getting in: social capital versus educational capital.

Natalie: What would you say are the greatest difficulties for you as a working screenwriter?

Catherine: Well, I think for a lot of people it's getting started frankly.

I asked all my participants to tell me about their own journey into the UK film industry and, in particular, how they got their first paid job. It is difficult to draw many wide conclusions from such a small sample, but my findings support the notion that there is more than one route into a creative career in film. For the screenwriters, work in television and theatre was the most common career prior to securing film work. Four male and two female screenwriters had previously worked in television and two male and two female screenwriters had written for the stage. However, rarely was success in one of these media cited as a direct path to a film screenwriting commission, and indeed even when it was, some found the transition between media a less than straightforward one:

It's a bit like going up to someone you've heard is a really good plumber and saying 'I've heard you're a really good plumber, would you like to come and landscape my garden?' and it's like 'Why would you think I'd be good at that? I'm a plumber!' sort of thing. (Natasha, screenwriter)

Four of the female screenwriters had been actresses, although none of the male screenwriters mentioned having done any paid acting work. The popularity of this background for women may be due to the lack of work for older actresses:

If I'd been a man I might not have got to the point in my mid-30s where I was frustrated by my acting career, because there may have been more opportunities for me as an actor. So therefore I may not have had the need to find something else to do. (Catherine, screenwriter)

Other previous careers and creative experience mentioned by the screenwriters included novel writing, being in bands, working in film development (see Chapter 4) and making short films. Two screenwriters specifically mentioned getting help from friends that they already knew within the film industry.

The employers had even more diverse backgrounds. Four had previously worked in television, three had been to film school, two started off on the bottom rung as runners, two had been talent agents, two had worked in art-house cinemas, one had worked in radio, one in film production and one in music video production. Three mentioned getting a foot in the door with help from friends that they knew in a personal context. The variety of backgrounds exhibited by both screenwriters and their employers illustrates that, in the film industry, specific qualifications or previous experience are not necessary to begin a career (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2009). Even where previous work is available to be assessed, Denise Bielby's research on gender inequality has shown that there is a lack of consensus in the film industry on how to assess or account for an individual's input:

measuring the specific contributions of individual artists to the quality of an aesthetic object is inherently ambiguous, and in commercialized mass culture industries there is little consensus about what constitutes competence among creative personnel (Bielby, 2009, p.240)

In a collaborative media such as film, television or theatre, it can be difficult to attribute the success or failure of a product to one person. Therefore employers often rely on more than their own review of a candidate's body of work. Reputation is key for screenwriters, most commonly in the form of personal recommendation from a trusted source, or evidence

of employment with a number of significant employers leading to the perception that everyone is relying on ‘established talent’ and trying to hire the same few names.

...my list of writers that I know are likely to get a commission is tiny. It’s really small. (Laura, employer)

We had a writer and we needed to find somebody else, and so we got a list. And the list is – it’s not a list tailored to this project, it’s a list of A List writers. And they’re all very good but some of them are so obviously not suited, you know because as I said they need to have a comedic element or, and some of those guys are really serious, which doesn’t mean they’re not good but nevertheless they haven’t written up to this point anything comedic. And they’re just being mentioned because they’re big names and they’ve had success and won awards and therefore they are good. (Eloise, employer)

Here, Eloise describes how a list of suitable candidates was given to her by her financiers, who appear to be more concerned with a screenwriter’s volume of work than their suitability for the job. It is perhaps worth noting that she refers to the screenwriters as ‘guys’, a term which is most often used to refer to men. However, she also acknowledged that this same validation by reputation can be applied to those who are new to screenwriting:

I heard this person that everybody respects loves this new writer, so it can only mean that they’re great. (Eloise, employer)

In contrast, many of the employers I spoke to in my research expressed confidence in their ability to read and assess screenplays for creative and commercial potential as I discussed in the previous chapter. There was a shared sense that good writing is objectively recognizable. For example:

With a producer, if somebody’s hiring me, you can’t tell if a producer is good until you hire them really. If you read a script [that] is good that person can’t argue with it. (Pippa, employer)

The quality of writing, that’s probably the best way to put it, the quality of writing and writer is the most important factor. (Ian, employer)

In this way, an individual’s subjective opinion of a writer or screenplay is framed as an objective, incontestable assessment. This, as I have shown, is tied into the belief that the industry is a meritocracy and talented individuals will find their way to success. However, there was also evidence of conflicting opinions about what makes a good screenplay:

...relatable characters, people you care about (Jack, screenwriter)

...screenplays, it seems to me, are all about the structure (Natasha, screenwriter)

I sort of think dialogue is more important than structure. (Nicola, employer)

...there's so many different, there's so many different facets to it, I think and there's so many different kinds of screenwriting. (Robert, screenwriter)

These kinds of debates over screenplay content can give the impression that careful consideration is being given as to which individuals and projects are most worthwhile of investment, but they can also be used to detract from questions of fairness and equality of access. Discussions about addressing inequalities were notably scarce in my participants' descriptions of how they assess screenwriters and screenplays, although Vicky did recognize how access can be easier for some who have the right demographic attributes, as opposed to a strong track record:

Vicky: Yeah. 'He's like us'. It's more golf club and 'he's a bit like my son'. You know I hear that a lot 'he reminds me of my son'. Wow. Gosh.

Natalie: Daughters?

Vicky: I've not heard anybody say it. So it is like: 'we can have a conversation with him'. 'He's a good guy' I think I've heard. There are so many things you hear and then you're like 'oh that's what that means!' I mean he might be a good guy, I don't know, but based on what we know so far I don't think he's better than anyone else. You kind of realize other people don't need to say: 'this is what I've done before'. Because it's taken as read that you'll be fine.

Irena Grugulis and Dimitrinka Stoyanova have shown how the film industry teaches 'unskilled workers' through "participation in a community of fellows" (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2009, p.139). Learning is done 'on the job', and entrance is not reliant on formal qualifications (Ibid.). Vicky's comments above suggest that the right habitus – that of being like those already working the industry – can possibly be more significant than qualifications, ability or experience when it comes to getting in and getting on. I will return to explore how Bourdieu's concept of habitus can help with an understanding of how people are excluded from the UK film industry in Chapter Seven, but it is worth noting here that once again we have two prevailing discourses that are at odds with one another. There is talk of a reliance on reputation on the one hand, and a belief in objective assessment of a writer's work on the other. As I have shown, a closer look at the latter reveals that it is quite contested in and of itself and there is little consensus as to what constitutes a good script. Much discursive work has to be done to make sense of these dichotomies, and indeed much labour is done within

the industry too. In order to have an up to date knowledge of screenwriters' reputations requires the employers to be in a constant state of consultation with each other, creating a hierarchy of networks (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012) and opinions, as I shall unpack in more detail in the second half of this chapter. Through these networked conversations, these discourses together function to allow individuals to justify subjective choices and to present opinions as facts. There is little room for consideration of subjective taste, and where there is, a hierarchy of tastes is established where some tastes are better than others, as I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter Seven. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note that in the constant buzz of information exchange between employers, a screenwriter's worth and consequent employability are crystalized, even in the ebb and flow as people fall into and out of favour depending on their most recent work (Blair, 2000b).

It is important then, that we understand how these networked processes of assessment and judgment work in more detail. Before I turn to that, however, I will examine how my participants talked about getting into the industry in the first place. How does a person come to be in the position of being discussed, or of being a discussor? In the next sections I will discuss some common patterns of access to the film industry that can be identified in my interviews. I begin by highlighting the requirements that do seem to be necessary to start a career in the film industry: personal contacts and attendance at particular universities and schools.

5.1.1 Nepotism, social and educational capital.

Nepotism is "the practice among those with power or influence of favouring relatives or friends, especially by giving them jobs" and derives from the French and Italian words for nephew (oxforddictionaries.com). Nepotism is a widely tolerated practice in the film industry (Blair, 2009, Blair et al., 2001a, Blair et al., 2003, Francke, 1994, Grugulis and Stoyanova,

2012, Randle, 2010), clearly recognizable through shared surnames and potentially creating a very small and closed network. My research data was peppered with references to early opportunities through personal contacts and family members, even in the biographies of the women and those from less well-represented communities. For example:

And my husband looked at it and he said ‘ooh, I think we should show this to (producer). (Producer) was the producer he’d just worked with and he gave it to her. (Catherine, screenwriter)

My dad works in film, and my uncle and my godfather. (Kate, employer)

I knew one rich guy, so I managed to make him give me fifteen hundred quid to make a short film that I sort of wrote. (Frankie, screenwriter)

I heard about the job through a kind of friend of a friend of a friend and got the interview. (Vanessa, employer)

Indeed, Yvonne, one of the most experienced employers that I spoke to, admitted:

It’s very, very hard to have no relationship to an organization and get your first full commission that way, but it doesn’t *not* happen. (Yvonne, employer)

A few were keen to tell me that they had found their way in without having any contacts, an acknowledgement of actually how rare this is:

I didn’t know anyone in the industry (Nick, employer)

The old adage of ‘it’s not what you know, but who you know’ but I didn’t know anybody really but there was some connection made obviously through the work that paid off. (Hannah, screenwriter)

The capital derived from social connections - social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) – is clearly evidenced here. Bourdieu has shown how social capital gives advantage to those who have it to “extract the full yield from their academic qualifications” or even “make up for their lack of formal qualifications” (Ibid, p.147). He argues that social capital is particularly important in “relatively unbureaucratized areas of social space (where social dispositions count for more than academically guaranteed ‘competences’)” (Ibid), as is the case in the UK film industry.

Some participants who clearly had contacts tried to discount their usefulness, perhaps in order to maintain a conviction that the industry is meritocratic, but also in order to argue that it was their own skills and abilities that got them to where they were:

But then I didn't make it massively easy on myself because I did get a list of people to write to from my dad but then I didn't tell them that I was his daughter because I didn't want nepotism to come into play [laughs]. (Kate, employer)

At the time the last thing I wanted to do was go into the film business because my family were all in the film business. (Pete, employer)

Statements such as these are particularly powerful since they reference the family connection, which can reinforce a sense of innate ability, but at the same time portray the individual as succeeding simply because they worked hard and demonstrated a personal suitability for the job. In particular, both employers do not appear to acknowledge the value they received from their familial connections, such as a list of contacts, an insider's viewpoint, a similarity of habitus. I also encountered participants whom I knew well, who omitted details of personal contacts and close relationships with their employers from their biographies when talking to me, in favour of a narrative of having succeeded on their own merit. One participant had taken over the position that his wife previous held – a striking coincidence (see Chapter Three). Since these omissions happened in several of the interviews it struck me as something noteworthy. It's not clear how conscious the speakers were in making these omissions, but it is arguable that discursive work was being done to establish their own personal aptitude as a more acceptable way to describe their career rather than referencing advantages derived from their social capital.

In our conversations there were many discussions of nepotism, mostly from participants referencing others rather than themselves:

...and like, Ken Loach's²⁵ son was an assistant producer and he'd not even done half of what I'd done but he was allowed to direct. There was another girl there whose mother was one of the senior researchers and she'd brought her in. So there was a lot of that going on. (Jay, employer)

...you know, cos of his mother, you know, he was in the business. (Pippa, employer)

When I first went to the National Film School²⁶ I couldn't believe the elitism that was there, the nepotism and favouritism and 'let's all keep this industry to ourselves'. (Colin, employer)

²⁵ Ken Loach is a British film director with a long and illustrious career. See his list of credits here: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0516360/>

²⁶ The National Film and Television School is highly respected and world-renowned. For more information, see their website here: <https://nfts.co.uk/>

In addition, there was an awareness of the advantage of having certain kinds of education. In particular, the predominance of those who had attended a private school:

The industry here, we know it's very matey, it's very nepotistic, it's very private school boys, let's be honest. (Emma, screenwriter)

I dress like a nice, middle-class white girl and I know how to interact with all those nice, middle-class white men because I went to a nice private school and that's my world. (Pippa, employer)

The way that both Emma and Pippa talk about private schools suggests that attendance at one is less about getting a good education and more about acquiring the right habitus and the social capital gained from those you might meet there.

There was also a clear discourse throughout my conversations that suggested that it was advantageous to have attended university at Oxford, Cambridge or Bristol. This was apparent in the talk of both those who attended one of these three universities, as well as those who had not:

So you know it still happens through the Bristol set, the Oxbridge set, the dinner parties. A lot of that. Mostly that I would say. (Jay, employer)

...when we first started writing it was all men and they were all of a type, you know, Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol. (Patrick, screenwriter)

I didn't ask any of my participants where they went to university, or indeed whether they went to university. Eleven of the participants, more than one quarter of my sample, voluntarily told me that they had been to one of these three universities. No other university was mentioned by anyone, suggesting that if you went to one of these three, you know that it is worth revealing in conversation. Once again, the currency of attendance at one of these universities appears to be less clearly about the quality of their education than a signifier of the right habitus and considerable social capital in the UK film industry, and it also seems to increase their confidence.

I went to Cambridge University and you're surrounded by these kids who have everything. They went to these great private schools, their parents are politicians or great movie actors - it makes you want to do amazing things as well. (Tessa, screenwriter)

The notion of confidence was very gendered in my conversations, with it frequently being presented as a requirement of the job and therefore a key reason why women might have less success in screenwriting than men:

It requires a level of assertion and pig-headedness that men are more able to call upon. Women are more self-doubting. (Lance, screenwriter)

Jack: There's a lot of women in development as development execs. I don't know if that's a role they feel more comfortable doing than writing, because of a confidence barrier you have to overcome to sit down and write.

Natalie: Why would men have more confidence than women?

Jack: Because women are cleverer that's why. Women are cleverer. Because they know. They know. They know how difficult it is, how hard it is and they undersell themselves.

There is clearly some discursive work being done in these examples to present men as less clever and more selfish and stubborn, disclaimers that the speakers use in order that they cannot be accused of making a sexist statement about women. However, in the context of recruitment, the repeated reference to women's lack of confidence also works to individualize the problem – it's not the industry's problem that there are so few women, it is down to the women to work on themselves to become more confident. Rather than suggesting changes to the industry, it places the onus on disadvantaged groups.

It is beyond the scope of this project to examine whether class and educational and related social capital can completely level the playing field for men and women. However, particularly amongst the more established of my screenwriter participants, my research does reinforce a significant observation on the final page of Marsha McCreadie's book of interviews with successful women screenwriters:

Nearly every woman writer I interviewed was from what Americans prefer to call the upper middle class; really our upper class. They were all from privileged backgrounds, or had gone to exclusive undergraduate or graduate schools. (McCreadie, 2006, p.150)

Six of my female screenwriters mentioned that they had been to one of the three named universities, and all of these were white women. This perhaps does suggest that men are less reliant than women on having gone to the right university or belonging to the right class, or

perhaps have less need to bring it up in conversation. I am aware that one of the male employers went to Cambridge but he did not bring it up in his interview with me.

It was common for my participants to seem comfortable discussing possible disadvantage in their industry in class terms:

I'm always conscious of the fact that directing is a rich boy's game. You know, it's only rich kids that do it. (Ed, screenwriter)

So then you get into class and the whole thing about film producers just being trustafarians, people who have just come into the industry with money. And there is no one of my experience who goes against that. (Laura, employer)

I often think if you want to get exclusively into films I don't know how you do it these days apart from if you've got really rich parents and you're a trustafarian. (Patrick, screenwriter)

I think that it's quite an insecure profession that is quite often undertaken by trustafarians. (Pete, employer)

Trustafarians are "privileged white kids who subscribe to the hippie lifestyle (because they can) since they have no worries about money, a job etc." (Urbandictionary.com). It is clear that here the term has some discursive power in the UK film industry and is more likely being used to refer to the prevalence of people who seem to have no money worries, as though they had a trust fund from their parents. This class discourse was often connected to the acutely felt issue of low and sporadic pay, and the recognition that film work can require a long period of apprenticeship or work experience for little financial reward:

It's back to a class thing. How on earth do you enter this industry at any level if you can't afford to live in your parents' house and get them to give you an allowance for three years? You know? It takes that long for people to take you seriously and pay you properly. (Kate, employer)

I think I worked for over 14, 15 months doing work experience. (Laura, employer)

The application of this to screenwriting work is less obvious, since there are few opportunities for on the job training or work experience. For screenwriters, it reflects the requirement to self-fund your own training and improvement (Conor, 2014) and possibly alludes to the length of time it takes to build up contacts and a reputation for good work:

I think in many ways I couldn't have survived my first year of being a writer if I hadn't been propped up by my parents so you know it was that background did have a part for me as well, you know they helped me financially because I just couldn't have done it otherwise. You're earning so little money that we would have just starved to death. (Patrick, screenwriter)

...so essentially unless you've got a rich uncle, a private income or another job... (Freddie, screenwriter)

I mean, I've got to the point now where I'm not going to write another script unless I'm being paid for it. I'm not writing another spec because I'm beyond, I've got a body of work, I've got a day job, I've got a family. My time is precious, I'm not going to sit down and write a spec script. (Jack, screenwriter)

Even experienced screenwriters are often asked to do work for free at the beginning of a project in order to secure a commission because of the high-risk nature of the commissioning process:

I think if there was more development money in this country I think there would just be more chances taken. More of kind of 'yes let's go with this idea and develop it up and maybe it will work or not' (Fiona, screenwriter)

'Could you send me a treatment²⁷ and by the way we can't pay you' usually in one same breath. (Emily, screenwriter)

...you talk to a development exec or a commissioner and they're interested in the idea, but you usually have to go and do a lot of work, you know, unpaid work to even get a kind of initial commission. (Usma, screenwriter)

Emily also believed that it might be more difficult for women to ask for money under these circumstances:

I think there's some truth in the fact that women aren't as good at going and asking for money. Saying 'actually I deserve to be paid'. I think that's a cultural thing. I don't think we're encouraged to behave like that. You see it in films – the cold bitch, that's what she does. She acts like a man and asks for money. She's a hard-core businesswoman and I think no, that's just basic humanity: I'm doing a job, I should be paid for it. But I've seen male colleagues and it's quite a natural thing for them whereas I have to gear myself up. (Emily, screenwriter)

Whilst this supports the view recently made popular by Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook that women just need to 'lean in' (Sandberg, 2013), and, as former Sony Picture Chair Amy Pascal recently said, "know what they're worth" (Beaumont-Thomas, 2015), there is also evidence that women who ask for money are judged more harshly than men (Bowles et al., 2007). For women without another source of finance, it is potentially even more difficult to support themselves and sustain their career, particularly whilst they are still trying to establish their reputation.

Clearly there are gendered aspects to pay in the film industries as evidenced by the gendered pay gap revealed for A List actors in the Sony Pictures hacked documents (Lapidos,

²⁷ A screenplay treatment is a document of around five to ten pages that outlines the film's storyline and introduces the main characters. It is often used to secure finance for development and/or production.

2015). In 2012, women screenwriters earned just seventy-seven cents for every dollar earned by white male film writers, a drop from eighty-two cents in 2009 (Hunt, 2014). My research also indicates that women from lower class backgrounds may be doubly disadvantaged and have an even more difficult time gaining access to screenwriting work in the UK film industry. In the context of my research question, it is important to note that class appears to be an acceptable way that individuals can talk about degrees of advantage and disadvantage in accessing screenwriting work. In the next section I will briefly examine how these discourses of class and educational advantage might obscure evidence of gender and racial inequalities.

5.1.2. Disarticulation of gender disadvantage.

Class is the predominant discourse of disadvantage in the film industry, even for those who clearly felt individually disadvantaged by their gender and skin colour. This can be seen in Pippa's comment above where she describes herself as sounding like "a nice, middle-class white girl". Pippa described her background as the "usual, stereotypical immigrant story" and explained that her father had come from India with no money or education but had set up his own business and earned enough to send his children to "good schools". She uses her educational capital - "I went to a nice private school" - rather than address the differentness of her race or gender. Vicky, who describes herself as "African", believed that dressing like the people with whom she is meeting would help to prevent her being perceived as different when pitching for film finances:

I get that all the time. I walk into a room of investors, they're not expecting, they might not have clocked my name, they are not expecting 'Other' and there is that kind of 'what have you done before?' or 'what school are you at?' you know? There is that sense of you're not going to be capable. And I have to be conscious of it. I'm aware that I can't, I love to have red hair and be really funky....But there is that thing, you walk into a room and you've got five minutes to impress and I guess it's just easier if you're a guy dressed the same as all the other guys that come in.

Vicky didn't highlight her gender as a disadvantage but her use of the term 'guy' and 'all the other guys' suggests that she is aware of it. She went on to say "surely if I was a guy I could

just go [adopts laid back pose] ‘yeah’ – cocksure”. Pippa, however, as I illustrated in the last chapter, was one of those who voiced a more dominant discourse that her gender was far from being a disadvantage and indeed was probably an advantage in gaining employment:

I hate to think it’s the industry that’s prejudiced. I don’t feel as a woman that I’m never employed because I’m a woman. I’ve never felt that, ever. Maybe I’m sometimes employed because I’m a woman.

At the same time she was keen to disassociate herself from the female gender:

I’m not girly. I’m not a girly girl. I’m um...I’m a bit of a tomboy and I think I’ve got slightly more male genes than most people.

She did also recognize that it was her that was expected to work to fit in:

I’m the one that’s adapted in a way to make it work and they won’t even think about it, you know, but they’re comfortable because the film industry is so rich and so middle class. You speak a certain way, and you look a certain way and you know about social etiquette and how to kind of laugh at the right moments or whatever it may be. That’s so much part of it. You fit in and you’re accepted and therefore you’re okay. But if I was [adopts cockney accent] ‘all right, how’s it going?’ and I came in a sari or I was a really traditional Indian woman, I don’t think I would fit in, who knows?

Her references to a sari and ‘a traditional Indian woman’ indicates that she, like Vicky, is aware of the gendered and raced aspects of what she is saying but avoids highlighting it, seemingly more comfortable talking about class. However, she does acknowledge that:

...it’s just generally harder for women and women of colour to succeed because there’s not very many of us and I think it’s just a human instinct to work with people that you’re comfortable with and you’re used to having around.

In this way she accounts for any potential prejudice she may face as a natural human instinct and not as sexism or racism, without questioning the idea that employing people that you consider to be more like yourself, and therefore more trustworthy and familiar, is a form of sexism and racism. On a discursive level, the recourse to nature and instincts also allows her to solve the ideological dilemma between her statement that she’s never felt disadvantaged and her observation that gender and race do matter.

Hannah explicitly argued that class was for her more clear-cut as an issue than her gender:

...it’s harder to know what’s going on with the male/female thing I think, it’s harder to judge that because you just can’t tell if it’s because you’re a woman. The class thing is easier for me, and I feel like very sure that those things are very clear and very difficult to get right, when you’re meeting some exec, that you just know, they might be the same gender but you know they are a different class and you’re

trying to joyfully express your idea and you can see them going ‘ooh that sounds so tacky’. (Hannah, screenwriter)

Hannah’s reference to ‘some exec’ finding her idea ‘tacky’ echoes Bourdieu’s observation that the dominant classes find the tastes of the lower classes “vulgar” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.171). This suggests that Hannah identifies as a less dominant (lower) class than those she is applying to for work. However, across my participants, class talk wasn’t limited to those in the less moneyed classes, possibly because working in the film industry was viewed repeatedly as requiring a substantial amount of money - see Laura’s comment about ‘trustafarian’ producers above. Laura had worked in publishing for over a year after university without getting paid, suggesting that she was able to support herself financially during this time and therefore is perhaps not of a working class background. Throughout my interviews, race and gender inequalities tended to be disarticulated more than class inequalities. In fact, some seemed to notice disparities for the first time in response to me bringing up gender inequality as a topic of conversation. Patrick reflected that in his experience in radio comedy writing he was more aware of class differences than very obvious gender inequalities:

Especially in comedy it seems to be that Oxbridge male set who tend to dominate. Especially Radio 4 when we first started writing it was all men and they were all of a type, you know, Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol. It was all that kind of type. And occasionally you would get a female writer in there and I, probably being young, never stopped to think ‘gosh what’s that like?’ Like (female writer) who was always there and she was always really, really funny and I never thought, ‘wow, what’s that like for her to be in a room full of fifteen blokes trying to get her ideas across?’ but it never struck me because she was always very confident and funny and her ideas were better than mine (laughs).

However, I encountered many examples of gendered experiences working and seeking work within the film industry. For example from Corrine, a screenwriter and director:

On my first film. The first shot was in the can. It was about 7am in the morning and one of the male crew comes up to me and says ‘Why do women bleed?’ and I’m all confused and I don’t know what to say so he says ‘because they’re evil’ and walks off laughing. It was just meant to destabilize me and put me off. (Corrine, screenwriter)

Or Emily talking about pitching her screenplay ideas:

I pitched this romantic comedy and it's 'lovely, lovely' and then I pitched this full on action film but it's fast and funny and she sat there and said 'women don't write actions films. Come on [Emily] you know this, you're not going to get anywhere with that sort of thing.'

Frankie described how she “always dressed down because I don't want to be looked at as beautiful because that means objected [sic]” by which we could interpret that as a woman she is having to consciously work to present herself as agentic. When I picked up on the point that Gillian's boss was a man she said ‘it's a he. Yeah, it's always a he’, and Hannah noted that “even my agent has a football team with all his writers and directors that I'll never be on” – noting the missed opportunity for networking as well as an awareness of difference. The gendered experiences are sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, but - perhaps because of the isolation of screenwriters from others in the same position as them, and the limited number of female screenwriters - this generally had not built into a wider understanding of gender discrimination as part of the job market in the film industry.

In addition, screenwriting work was often discussed in gendered terms by the employers I spoke to, such as Frank suggesting Lucinda Coxon working with Guillermo del Toro on “Pacific Rim” (del Toro, 2013) would give her more “muscle”²⁸. Rob thought a good screenwriter would show a “mastery of the craft” and Vanessa was one of many who suggested that a necessary prerequisite that a screenwriter must be able to “fight for their own ideas”. Martha considered that screenwriting was “like very fine drawing, a very elegant, whether it's Leonardo da Vinci or Henry Moore” – reinforcing the association of creativity and men. Nicola suggested you needed to be “tough” and Patrick compared screenwriting to being “a prop forward in rugby”, “a good carpenter” or an architect “creating a blueprint”, all very male-dominated professions. In addition there were several comparisons to screenwriting and film production being like the military or prison, the “brutality of the world” (Laura, employer), and the writer as ‘king’ (never queen). Perhaps most remarkably

²⁸ Although she appears to be uncredited on the final film.

Lance gave me an extended metaphor where he explained that because “women are better nurturers, hard-wired to look after their offspring. Men are not hard-wired to hang around”, that men might find it easier to hand their screenplay ‘baby’ over to a director than a woman would. The idea was echoed by Jack who suggested that women might be drawn to development work in order to “nurse a baby through to production” suggesting by omission that his role as a screenwriter did not include the same level of commitment.

Discussions would often leak into talking about film production rather than development because it was generally thought to be easier to account for the lack of women directors due to the continued predominance of childcare responsibilities falling on female shoulders:

If you’ve got kids or family I don’t know how women with young children direct, I just don’t know how they do it. So you’ve either got to be single, or divorced or whatever, or have a really understanding mother, so just practically I think, it’s trouble whereas for men it’s just never an issue. (Pippa, employer)

I’ve asked this question of people ‘Why are there so few female directors?’ The answer to that might even strike a chord with you: ‘They get married and have families and it’s more than a full time job’. They take over all that and it’s got to have an impact, I’m afraid. That doesn’t completely explain the pitifully low number of female writers. (Rob, employer)

I will address the issues around childcare and employment in creative professions in detail in the next chapter, but it’s worth considering here that childcare was seen by many of my participants as an acceptable way to account for a continued lack of women – another way that their absence was individualized and therefore dismissed as an industry problem. There was little or no discussion in my conversations as to whether childcare should be a woman’s task or whether the film industry should adapt to accommodate such caring responsibilities. Ros Gill has argued that these claims about women and childcare as explanation for the lack of women in creative industries “have taken on an almost hegemonic status as the ‘acceptable face of feminism’” (Gill, 2014, p.511), leaving little room for other areas of critique. It was presented to me as common sense and as negating the need to look for other reasons for continued inequality.

Some female writers don't really start emerging until their kids have got to a certain age. (Frank, employer)

I also think it's not conducive with having a family. I was incredibly ambitious and then I had kids. (Nicola, employer)

The difficulty in talking about sexism and gendered forms of discrimination in the post-feminist workplace has been well documented by feminist academics (Gill, 2000, Kelan, 2009, McRobbie, 2009b). The women screenwriters I spoke to often played down the role their gender might play in their lack of success. Tessa gives a good example of this dynamic in her conversation with me:

Like for me my peer is (male screenwriter) who's incredibly successful. He was a friend of mine at Cambridge, so I compare myself to him and he's won all these awards and blah, blah, blah, and I've never had anything made. So I make quite a lot of money and I get consistent work, which is, you know, brilliant and more than anyone could ask for and my husband's always yelling at me 'you need to be happier with where you are!' and stuff like that. But you constantly compare yourself, I dunno, I do anyway.

She never mentions that gender might be a contributing factor in their comparative success and frames it as a very personal and individual story, but even though she's acknowledging her own achievements she clearly feels a sense of unfairness. Like Pippa's disavowing of sexism as human nature seen above, Emma was also keen to suggest that people weren't discriminating consciously and therefore couldn't be 'blamed', suggesting they can't be held accountable to change their behaviour:

...it's unconscious even, I don't blame people, it's just there, they just don't know how to deal with women and that's why to be honest (Emma, screenwriter)

Fiona suggested that the film industry was just like any other industry. Her tone and laughter made it sound like she believed this was just the way life is and there's not much that can be done about it:

I mean you've got a lot of key women doing great things? And female producers. It's a male dominated world, isn't it [laughs]? I don't know because it shouldn't be the case but I think it's probably a case of women having children and men getting hired over women because that's what happens in every industry. (Fiona, screenwriter)

I will now turn to look at how working screenwriters are required to sustain their careers through socialized employment practices and how this contributes to the upholding of gender and other inequalities.

5.2 Informal recruitment practices and gendered outcomes for screenwriting work in the UK film industry.

Increasingly there is evidence that reliance on personal networks and informal employment practices has different outcomes for men and women (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). Hiring on short-term contracts in a context of ambiguity, risk and uncertainty necessitates reliance on social networks and informal subjective criteria with outcomes that reinforce the status quo (Bielby and Bielby, 1999). The insecurity and anxiety produced by the unpredictable nature of project-based employment means that workers must be in a continuous process of looking for work (Randle and Culkin, 2009). In the film industry the need to be constantly ‘networking’ is an accepted part of the job. In this section, I examine the subjective methods of assessment to which screenwriters are exposed and unpack how industry-wide discourses work to uphold gender inequalities. I will demonstrate that these discourses have become legitimized as ‘best practice’ by both screenwriters and their potential employers and highlight the function of the discourses, which go beyond talk to limit opportunities in the UK film labour market.

A dominant discourse can be identified in the talk of my participants, in which a contacts culture is downplayed in favour of meritocratic and market-led decision-making processes. However, this is contradicted by another prevalent discourse that reveals the importance of personal connections. I will give examples of recurring patterns in the talk of my participants that contest the key film industry discourse of democratic meritocracy, and demonstrate how, in a context of high risk and uncertainty, employers use risk reduction

strategies in their recruitment processes such as a reliance on personal contacts or the opinions of trusted or powerful individuals. I will further argue that the same high-risk environment has been shown to encourage reliance on homophily as shorthand for trust, and examine how these two strategies combine to limit individual opportunity and uphold gender inequality.

5.2.1. Project-based work and socialized recruitment practices

Creative Skillset's report on the status of women in the creative industries in the UK found that representation was highest in sectors with larger employers in which more stable, permanent employment models are common, such as terrestrial television (48 per cent), broadcast radio (47 per cent), cinema exhibition (43 per cent), and book publishing (61 per cent) (Creative Skillset, 2010b). Permanent employment might be more attractive for workers with childcare responsibilities because motherhood has been shown to have a detrimental effect on networking. Karen Campbell demonstrates how 'women with young children have more restricted network range, and lower network composition', but finds no correlating disparity for men who start a family (Campbell, 1988). In the next chapter I will offer a more detailed analysis of the effects of childcare responsibilities on female creative workers, but here it is important to note that since mothers are still required to allocate more time to domestic responsibilities than fathers, or men and women without children (Hochschild, 1983b, Renzulli et al., 2000), they also have less time for other activities. However, motherhood does not provide the complete explanation (see Gill, 2014). Denise Bielby and James Baron have also demonstrated that 'autonomous employers operating small firms need no explicit rationale for excluding female workers; they can unilaterally exercise their preference for an all-male network' (Bielby and Baron, 1984, p.38). How can we account for such discriminatory practices?

Structural factors, which suggest how the opportunities available to an individual may be limited by their social position and background, are the favoured explanation in studies of gender and networking (Ibarra, 1992, McGuire, 2000). Since networking ‘is primarily a social activity’ (Cromie and Birley, 1992, p.242) it is therefore likely to be highly influenced by the status and social position of the person doing the networking. This argument is most persuasive when considering the limited numbers of women and black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals (BAME) in more senior, decision-making roles. For screenwriters, the equivalent would be a film’s producers. Screenwriters are most frequently commissioned (employed) by producers, the majority of whom are men (77 per cent of producers and 81 per cent of executive producers of the 250 highest grossing films in 2014 were men (Lauzen, 2015, p.482)).

Academic research on finding employment using personal networks in the film labour markets in the UK and USA has tended to focus on the physical production phase of the industries, (Blair, 2000b, Blair, 2003, Blair et al., 2001b, Christopherson, 2008, Christopherson and Storper, 1988). Some of the observations and conclusions of this work are not easily translated to roles outside the specialized world of the production community. For instance, Helen Blair’s (2000a) formulation of the ‘semi-permanent work group’ – a team of individuals who move between jobs as a unit with only the most senior member responsible for procuring work – applies to film production departments but similar protective enclaves are not available for screenwriters. To understand more precisely the wider mechanisms of informal recruitment and its ramifications for key creative workers such as screenwriters, it is necessary to turn to the research on networking in other fields, including those where personnel are recruited in a more formal manner through job advertisements and by Human Resource departments. The usefulness of this literature is clear, since even within formal employment structures it has been shown that informal

networks play a powerful role in upholding gender inequality (McGuire, 2002). Gail McGuire's interviewees – over a thousand financial services employees – confirm that informal networks are the place where the real power and opportunities are. Some are even disparaging of those who rely on the formal processes. As one interviewee reported: 'He said that vice presidents routinely exchanged such favors and that only "losers" went to human resources (i.e. used a formal procedure) to try to obtain promotions' (McGuire, 2002, p.318). It is therefore important to understand exactly how informal recruitment works to ensure different outcomes for women.

In her study of new media workers, Ros Gill reports that some of her interviewees found networking to be 'a form of gendered exclusion – the activities of an "old boys" network' (Gill, 2002). She cites one woman as longing for a return to a more formal and transparent job market and refers to Susan Franks' observation about the Hansard Commission: 'The clubbier the culture, the less likely women are to make the top' (Franks, 1999, p.52). In my research, the employers were keen to disavow – unprompted – that such mechanisms exist in the film industry. The most frequent way they did this was by referring to the very visible women in senior positions in the three largest, publicly funded film financing entities – the BBC, Film Four and the BFI.

There was a time, not so long ago when it was pointed out to me that major areas of film finance in the UK were being run by women. (Rob, employer)

I think a lot of the gatekeepers are women and let less women in, I really think so. (Colin, employer)

Interestingly enough the three biggest roles in the British film industry were held by women not that long ago. (Eloise, employer)

Indeed, there is recent evidence that these women may have played a part in the support of female creative workers (Steele, 2013). However, they all report to male bosses, and none was in a position to fully finance a film. Indeed their potential private finance partners are most frequently men:

I notice that distributors are very male. They're all male. (Gillian, employer)

I mean, to be fair, all three of the financiers were men. (Jo, employer)

...but if you look at the business side of things if you look at the distributors, it's certainly very, very male dominated. (Eloise, employer)

Moreover, even when women hold senior positions, Gail McGuire's (2002) research reveals that women receive less instrumental help from their network members, whereas BAME men were only discriminated against due to structural disadvantage, that is, when they obtained positions with more status, they received the same amount of help from their networks as white men do. The rest of this chapter will seek to establish how accepted discourses limit opportunities for female screenwriters, even in an apparently egalitarian creative industry (Gill, 2002) such as UK film production and finance, where overt sexism is rarely deemed acceptable behaviour.

5.2.2 Understanding the gendered outcomes of informal recruitment practices.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, a dominant discourse shared by employers and screenwriters and used to account for the unpredictability of career opportunities is the idea of the film industry as a meritocracy and the notion that 'talent will out'. This phrase refers to the commonly held belief that if you have any talent or ability you will inevitably be recognized by the film industry and a successful career will follow:

... there's a side of me that also feels very irritated by people who say there should be more women, there should be 50/50, because for me it has to be ultimately based on merit. (Eloise, employer)

This was also often related to the view that the selection of projects and screenwriters is based on 'what the market wants', that is, what sells:

I don't think there will ever be a really self-conscious 'oh we really, really need to be favouring' - you know, I don't think we'll get to a point, because there's a commercial imperative, so I don't think there will ever be a place of active, positive discrimination. (Nick, employer)

However, some of the screenwriters did express opinions that suggested they did not believe good work was always recognized:

... there is no point in railing against the people that make these decisions because a lot of people don't, wouldn't, know a good screenplay from a bar of soap to be totally honest. (Catherine, screenwriter)

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, and echoed in the quotes above from Nick and Eloise, this discourse of meritocracy is also used to justify not taking action to redress inequalities.

Another repeated discourse attributed to apparently neutral market forces was that discussed in the first section of this chapter: a desire for 'experienced' writers, with a demonstrable track record:

I would rather pay more money to Simon Beaufoy to write a screenplay, or Frank Cottrell Boyce or Abi Morgan, people we have relationships with but who are at the top of their game. I'd rather pay more money to those people because I think it's got a better chance of getting made, than what you might call a second tier writer, who simply isn't going to get there. (Ian, employer)

Increasingly, the smaller you are as an independent, the bigger the writer that you have to net (Laura, employer)

Everyone involved, the studio, the financiers, the cast are looking for that level of comfort that an experienced writer will bring to the table. (Nick, employer)

This preference supports Robert Faulkner and Andy Anderson's argument that cumulative disadvantage may be the reason for continued gender inequality in the film industry (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987). With women not being employed in key roles in sufficient numbers they have less experience and credits when the next opportunity comes along. However, this does not explain why employers talked about the contradictory and apparently endless search for 'new talent', or 'the next big thing':

...that sort of slight wrestling match between those bigger names who I'd ideally like to get to but they're always invariably unavailable for a really long time, and discoveries that you might find. (Vanessa, employer)

Discovering talent is kind of a sexy part of the industry. (Jo, employer)

Somehow this search for the new keeps turning up writers who fit the existing mould of white, middle or upper class men. To understand this, I will now explore how two key discourses of risk reduction and trust in the talk of employers of screenwriters can function to present exclusionary practices as benign, and as a 'logical' and 'rational' response to the high risk of making an expensive creative product. In this way, discrimination and inequality are

reinforced by mechanisms that are accepted as good business practice, leaving little room for any requirement to improve the industry's equal opportunity record.

5.2.3. Risk reduction strategies.

Creative work takes place in a context of high risk where the financial cost of the product must be paid out while profit is still uncertain (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). Each product is a unique, speculative endeavour in which the usual supply/demand dynamic is reversed and there is huge uncertainty about whether anyone will actually buy the product (see Hesmondhalgh, 2007, for a full discussion on how cultural industry companies respond to the perceived difficulties of making a profit). My interviewees repeatedly described a common solution that film producers can utilize, in order to attempt to attract investors to the risky prospect of a new film: employing key creative personnel who are known in the industry and have a track record. However, the difficulty in assessing an individual's contribution to the success of past projects (Bielby, 2009) creates two distinct recruitment practices that were frequently referenced by my research participants.

The first of these methods is to identify screenwriters who are trusted by recognized authorities, most commonly either individuals with recourse to significant film finance, or producers with prominent success:

I heard this person that everybody respects loves this new writer, so it can only mean that they're great.
(Eloise, employer)

We've got good relationships with Working Title, so we talk to them, ask their advice, who they think is good. (Colin, employer)

The other practice repeatedly referred to by the research participants is a reliance on people they already know, which resonates with Susan Rogers's findings that 50 per cent of writers of British films had a previous working relationship and 42 per cent had a personal relationship with the producer, director or production company responsible for their hiring (Rogers, 2007). This most commonly occurs when screenwriters who have been identified by

the previous method are unavailable or unattainable, but is also significantly observable in the discussions of those employers who fall into the previous category of recognized authorities, for example:

But you know a lot of our work comes from relationships that exist'. (Yvonne, employer)

In the first instance - there will be a handful and it really only is a handful of you know, really tried and tested writers that we've generally got pre-existing relationships with, have worked with before and have probably produced films with, you know, people that we know, people that we trust. They will make their way onto the list in pole position and then we will comb through the lists and try and find someone who might have written in that genre before, might have some experience, might be of an age where it would make sense and then we'll look at TV writers, sort of new and interesting voices and so we'll put some sort of new or leftfield ideas on – and then we'll generally just go to [Male Screenwriter] [laughs] or [Male Screenwriter]. (Nick, employer)

Identifying these two related discourses reveals that screenwriters need to be in a personal or professional relationship with one of the key financiers or successful production companies to stand the best chance of being hired in the film industry. The employers who spoke to me showed little if any embarrassment about the reliance of the industry on 'who you know', which suggests the practice is both accepted and legitimized, and indicates that – in this world – contacts are extremely important:

It's a small, incestuous world. (Vanessa, employer)

It's a guy I've known for a long time. (Eloise, employer)

I think we've been a little bit reliant on people finding us or being recommended and us going to a fairly small pool of usual suspects. (Jo, employer)

This practice of sticking with people you know well is even proposed as a productive way to manage a potentially vast pool of interested candidates by small companies with limited resources. This is not a new concept, nor one particular to the film industry:

The problem facing the employer is not to get in touch with the largest number of potential applicants; rather it is to find a few applicants promising enough to be worth the investment of thorough investigation. (Rees, 1966)

Attributing responsibility to risk-averse financiers who want a writer with a track record, and the subjective nature of creativity and creative relationships, it is easy for employers to believe they are 'gender blind'. However, 'blind' auditions opened up symphony orchestras to female musicians (Goldin and Rouse, 1997), so evaluation of creativity is not always as

objective as it may appear to be. How can screenwriters form these key relationships with one of a small number of influential people? More specifically for the purposes of this chapter, how does this reliance on the friendship and favour of selected individuals become gendered?

5.2.4. Trust and homophily.

When asked what made for a good relationship with a screenwriter, the employers whom I interviewed most frequently answered: trust. “Trust” was mentioned 96 times in my conversations, and by 24 participants.

Natalie: What do you think makes for a good relationship with a screenwriter?

Kate: I think for me it’s about trust.

Vicky: I think trust. I think you always know when you’ve got, when you’re working with a writer that trusts and likes you.

Rob: There’s total trust, okay?

Jo: Trust, trust, trust, trust, trust.

This was something the experienced screenwriters also appeared to be aware of:

I think they need security because it’s a terrifying thing to hire somebody really young on a wing and a prayer. (Jo, screenwriter)

I think honesty and trust are absolutely crucial (Catherine, screenwriter)

The employers do not demonstrate a desire to embrace the vulnerability and risk that is associated with trust as a distinct concept (Mayer et al., 1995) as indeed it is precisely these difficulties that they hope to overcome by finding a screenwriter whom they feel they can trust. The concept of trust in their discourses is closer to the notions with which it is commonly conflated: cooperation, confidence and predictability (ibid.). Confidence and predictability fostered through familiarity were apparent in the participants’ understanding of trust:

You’ve got to be able to trust that person. (Natasha, screenwriter)

... we kind of knew each other very well and we’d spent a lot of time together developing the project so she trusted me. (Jo, employer)

Indeed, those employers who didn't specifically mention trust in regard to working relationships drew on closely aligned notions of respect, honesty, collaboration, openness and loyalty. However, women and people of working class or BAME background are not given equal access to employment in the UK film and television industries precisely because they are not trusted by the industry establishment who are still most frequently white, middle- and upper-class men (see Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). Rosabeth Kanter's ground-breaking study of gender at work, "Men and Women of the Corporation", argues that in 'conditions of uncertainty' people fall back on social similarity as a basis for trust (1977: 49). Every film is a unique product and must be marketed to potential audiences as such. Veteran screenwriter William Goldman (1983) famously said of the film industry 'Nobody knows anything', referring to the impossibility of predicting the success of creative work. There is a great deal of uncertainty about which films will find an audience sufficient to make a profit, and most films never do. At the point of screenplay commission, this uncertainty is at its greatest. The conditions prevail for those involved to want to work with others who are most like them, who are more likely to share cultural references and to pull together around decisions.

Making a film is really hard, and so if you set out on the journey with somebody who you just don't quite get on with ... (Vanessa, employer)

It's an instinctual thing when you talk to them, you've got that connection to them, and you feel like when you're discussing a project it can progress in the right way. (Colin, employer)

A reliance on homophily provides the employers with the desired conditions to trust those that they are employing, but a lack of awareness of its contribution to their recruitment processes masks the way such subjectivity upholds the inequality of gender, race and class in key creative positions.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, homophily is the extent to which two individuals in a network are similar and can be understood as the tendency for people to want to associate with those they feel they are most like.

Interpersonal similarity increases ease of communication, improves predictability of behaviour, and fosters relationships of trust and reciprocity. (Ibarra, 1993).

People's networks have a strong tendency to contain others who are similar along multiple dimensions including gender, age, ethnicity and sexuality (Blau, 1994). This supports the evidence that networking is an activity that excludes (Christopherson, 2009, Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). Burt argues that 'network closure facilitates sanctions that make it less risky for people in the network to trust one another' (Burt, 2002). As we have seen above, the film industry relies on such small networks and such high barriers to entry that it is often necessary to have a relative to kick-start your career.

Women need additional advocacy to foster trust in potential employers (Burt, 2002). Herminia Ibarra (1992) demonstrates that women are less likely to be friends with those who can help their careers. Networking for work is a relatively unconscious act where job information is often passed on through social process rather than purposefully designed occasions (Blair, 2009, Granovetter, 1995). Many of the research participants talked about the mutual backgrounds, long-term relationships and shared social circles of those they work with:

... sometimes you meet a writer socially between drafts. (Frank, employer)

[Male Producer] and [Male Screenwriter] are very good friends. (Vanessa, employer)

[Good screenwriters are] I guess the kind of people you want to sit in a pub with for six hours. (Kate, employer)

My sample, which was artificially weighted to create a gender balance not reflected in the reality of the film industry, contained discussions of female homophily as well as male, for example:

... we don't have a similar background or anything but the fact that we both have a female sensibility (Jo, employer)

But with men continuing to far outnumber women as producers, executive producers and directors of films (Lauzen, 2015) the film labour market is likely to be much more biased. Indeed the prevalence of women employing women in my sample suggests that those who

are working are finding a large percentage of opportunities through other women and perhaps are not so trusted by men:

I've only worked with one male director. (Natasha, screenwriter)

All three of my feature films were directed by women. All three produced by women. (Catherine, screenwriter)

5.3. Conclusion

My research supports Denise Bielby's claim that, in the film industry, 'high levels of risk and uncertainty' turn stereotyping and discrimination 'into everyday business practices' (Bielby, 2009, p.239). This chapter is an attempt to challenge the symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) of discourses of 'meritocracy' so prevalent and embedded in the creative industries that they are accepted and seen as legitimate even by those who benefit least from them. By studying the recruitment and working lives of feature film screenwriters it is possible to identify mechanisms that work to uphold gender and other inequalities, even when those processes are not conscious or deliberate by those taking part. The results potentially have wider application in other creative professions, and indeed in other labour markets, where more formal recruitment systems have been repeatedly shown to operate as facades for parallel and powerful informal recruitment practices that are the key to the best and most lucrative jobs (Granovetter, 1995).

In this chapter I have contributed to the research on gendered outcomes of informal recruitment. I have demonstrated that where conditions of high risk and uncertainty prevail, individuals use risk reduction strategies in their recruitment processes such as a reliance on the opinions of trusted or powerful individuals. Those individuals in turn reduce their own perceived risk by working with screenwriters who are known to them either professionally or personally. When an individual's credits or experience cannot be relied upon, the employers turn to homophily to facilitate trust. At the same time, I have also shown that those working in the UK film industry find it difficult to talk about gender inequality in terms of access to

work, unless it is with reference to an apparent natural, biological instinct of women to want to nurture children rather than continue in the workplace. Gendered experiences and even examples of blatant sexism are described, but degrees of disadvantage in gaining screenwriting work are only comfortably discussed as a class problem. This is predominantly due to the educational and social capital derived from attending private school or one of three key universities, or as an acknowledgement of the financial difficulties in starting and sustaining a screenwriting career. Factors caused by the gender or racial background of an individual are occasionally acknowledged but often buried in a more acceptable class discourse, leaving little room for a shared understanding of the barriers that may be faced by women or BAME, particularly if they are also economically or educationally underprivileged. It is difficult for these individuals to talk about the discrimination and disadvantage they may face without access to discourses and understandings of the mechanisms at work. In this chapter I have begun to unveil these mechanisms and allow them to be talked about. I have shown how the right habitus is a significant advantage to being recognized as capable in the UK film industry. Whilst my participants may predominantly acknowledge this in class terms, they also presented considerable evidence that this is also true for class and race.

In an industry where social and educational capital have more weight than formal qualifications and there is no one set route to ‘getting in’, recruiters use homophily and shared habitus to enable them to feel confident in their choices. Objective, or even subjective evaluations of work are claimed by my participants, but they also indicate that recommendation, either personally or in the form of multiple commissions are frequently used as security, even for new writers. While white, middle- to upper-class men still dominate decision-making positions in the film industry, this in turn upholds the status quo and these powerful men are able to draw on the established discourses discussed here to

present exclusionary practices as logical, understandable and indeed, good business practice. One of the questions raised by my findings is why we still see others of a different gender, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality or indeed physical ability as so different that we find it difficult to trust them. This is something I will return to in the final chapter. Before that I consider how motherhood is discursively positioned amongst my research participants and analyze the potential costs of maternal assumption to women seeking a screenwriting career.

6. THE REAL COST OF CHILDCARE: MOTHERHOOD AND FLEXIBLE CREATIVE LABOUR IN THE UK FILM INDUSTRY.

So for me, the baby is now, the baby will be six weeks on Thursday so actually it was my biggest fear was coming out of the hospital I was like ‘How am I going to work? How am I going to work?’ It was horrible. (Tessa, screenwriter)

There is “one factor that above all leads to women’s inequality in the labour market – becoming mothers” (Commission for Equalities and Human Rights, 2007b, p.66). It’s difficult to talk about women and work without talking about childcare. The same is not true of a discussion of men and work and this is still one of the most obvious difficulties to be managed by working women, even those who choose not to have children. In the UK film industry, only 14% of women have children compared to 40% of men (Creative Skillset & UK Film Council, 2008, Section 2.6). In the population as a whole, 74.1% of women with dependent children under 19 are in employment (Penforld et al., 2014). Policy makers, and indeed mothers themselves, often talk about the desirability of flexible labour to accommodate family responsibilities (see for example Creative Skillset and WFTV, 2009, Creative Skillset, 2008, Creative Skillset, 2010b, Women Like Us, 2012, GOV.UK, WorkingFamilies.org.uk, Rowlatt and Stewart, 2010). As I have discussed, creative work has been shown to offer an exemplary case study for flexible labour markets (e.g. Banks, 2007, Davis and Scase, 2000, Gill, 2010, McRobbie, 2002a). However, although observing the continued absence of women in creative professions, there is little of the academic literature that critically examines the reasons for gendered outcomes in relation to motherhood.

One of the main reasons for this oversight is the lack of women with children who are actually working in the creative industries, which makes it difficult to capture the data about them. Whilst I do not wish to suggest that motherhood is the only, or even primary reason for continued gender inequality in creative work - see Gill (2014), in this chapter I hope to problematize the idea that flexible working offers a solution to the difficulties of balancing children and work. This argument has potential application outside the creative professions,

and highlights the necessity of a wider recognition of society's need for a supply of people as well as products. My research highlights the need for real-life solutions that are in line with feminist concerns about unrecognized maternal labour: solutions which challenge the perception of the male life cycle as the norm in the world of work and bring into the workplace a greater understanding and accommodation of the demands and responsibilities of parenting.

In the second half of this chapter I will explore some of the key features of flexible creative labour and analyse how my participants' talk exposes the difficulties presented when combining these aspects of working life with caring responsibilities. I will assess the costs of freelance, project-based work, informality in recruitment and work cultures, and the so-called 'creative freedom' of escaping a 'nine-to-five' office environment. Before I come to that, however, I will first examine how parental responsibilities are understood as gendered in the way that workers in the UK film industry discuss women and family life. I will identify key discourses that are frequently drawn upon to establish this inequality as incontestable, such as women as natural nurturers of children, and show how they work to position women as less than ideal for screenwriting work.

6.1. The maternal assumption and the breadwinner mentality.

Capitalist production, at least since the early 19th century, has based its efficacy on the separation of male and female roles, with men acting as the breadwinning head of household and women as homemaker and nurturer of the next generation of workers. (Banks and Milestone, 2011, p.75)

Key writing on gender, work and organizations has drawn attention to how women are positioned as less than ideal workers (Acker, 1990, Franks, 1999, Kelan, 2008). The view of women as inevitable mothers contributes to an unfavourable perception of them in the work place. The potential of women to have children, and the associated disruption to their career, can lead to *all* women being perceived as less worthy of investment – of time, of career

advice, of promotion and even of pay (Fitt and Newton, 1981, Groysberg, 2008, McGuire, 2002, Wajcman, 1998). While gendered assumptions prevail, it is difficult for women to overcome ‘the stigma of motherhood’ (Wajcman, 1998, p.46). In my interviews, motherhood was cited as one way to understand the lack of women in screenwriting and other professions:

I just can’t see what it is, apart from childcare. (Rachel, screenwriter)

I think because women have babies that’s a big part of it. (Fiona, screenwriter)

The only explanation that makes even a little bit of sense to me and if you’re happy for me to suggest that women as primary carers of children make up a statistically significant portion of the people you’re talking about. (Will, screenwriter)

As Ros Gill observed, motherhood has become the acceptable way to talk about the lack of women in creative industries (Gill, 2014). In this section I will explore how film industry discourses about women position them as less than ideal workers because of their potential to have children, and how this is naturalised and accepted by those who work in the UK industry. I will highlight the penalties of this maternal assumption for women wanting a screenwriting career, and show how women have difficulties taking up the subject position of committed, creative worker.

6.1.1. Essentialized gender characteristics and maternal assumption.

‘The question of who brings up the kids has a material effect on all women’s careers.’ (Beeban Kidon, director, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*). (Cochrane, 2010)

It was common amongst my participants to present motherhood as a natural instinct for women. In a key discourse, women were repeatedly positioned as both wanting children and choosing to devote their time to ‘nurturing’ them:

...possibly it’s traditional to see the female partner of the relationship as the one that does the nurturing, while the man does the hunter-gathering and female screenwriters can buy into that as much as anyone else. (Frank, employer)

Women are better nurturers. They are hard-wired to look after their offspring. (Lance, screenwriter)

A lot, it happens a lot. You know, they might want to be a film producer but then they fall in love and that’s all gone. They just decide they want to have children so they give it up. And men don’t have to make those choices. (Pippa, employer)

I've asked this question of people 'why are there so few female directors?' the answer to that might even strike a chord with you 'they get married and have families and it's more than a full time job'. (Rob, employer)

Despite feminist attempts to question the homogeneity of the category of 'woman' (most notably (Butler, 1990)), it is still very difficult for anyone presenting themselves as female to avoid the assumption that they will at some point become a mother, and will subsequently devote a substantial part of their time to looking after that child or children.

By framing motherhood as a natural instinct of all women, any adverse effects on a woman's career as a consequence of having children is understood as being part of her individual choice and therefore not something to be addressed more widely by the film community. The idea that women might be treated differently simply because of their potential ability to have children was not frequently discussed in my interviews. However, Yvonne spoke of her desire to support other women to have children and how it was a concern not always shared by those she was working with:

That's easy if you're a woman to help other women. [Allow them to] Take time off, help them feel protected, welcome them back in at the rate they want to come back in. And make them feel it's completely normal to feel exhausted and screwed up about it for a long time until they're settled into it for what they want. I love that. That's easy. What's harder is getting the rest of the world who are co-financing your films to actually engage with that. (Yvonne, employer)

There is wider evidence to support the notion that women might be treated differently in the workplace simply because of their potential to have children. In Margaret Wetherell, Hilda Stiven and Jonathan Potter's ground-breaking investigation of discourses of final year university students around gender and employment opportunities one of the young men suggested:

I suppose you can always see how an employer's mind will work, if he has a choice between two identically qualified and identically, identical personalities, and one is male and one is female, you can sympathize with him for perhaps wondering if the female is not going to get married and have children and then there's always the risk that she may not come back after, she may well do, a lot of women do, but uh I don't know he may well decide that the risk is not worth taking. (Wetherell et al., 1987, p.62)

In their study, eight of the ten female students thought that juggling a career and children would be a problem for them, while all of the male students hadn't considered it a problem.

Although this particular study is now twenty-five years old, the quotation above clearly echoes some of the comments about women, marriage and children in my interviews. In addition, more recent reports suggest that women are still viewed as being more responsible than men for the care of children. In a 2014 survey of Harvard Business School Graduates, for example, three quarters of the men expected that their partners would do most of the childcare and indeed many more of them reported this as a reality, as well as around 50% of them expecting that their careers would take precedence over their partner's (Ely et al., 2014). Putting it more explicitly than most, one salesman in Boris Goysberg's article on 'star' women who work on Wall Street confessed:

Say there are two analysts, John and Joanne – equally smart, equally good analysts, both in their late twenties/early thirties, both spend 14 hours a day at work. The day is only 24 hours long, so I have to allocate my time intelligently...Who is most likely to stay at the firm? Based on my experience, I have to say John. Joanne is going to get married...she might decide to have children...Is this not rational? It's just the way the business is. (Goysberg, 2008, p.78)

Screenwriter Corrine explained to me that she had not wanted to take the time to have children for fear of getting 'out of the loop' and being seen as a 'one-film wonder'. Emma also mentioned a fellow screenwriter who had made a choice about children:

I read one interview with her recently where she basically did not, decided not to have a second child in order to maintain her screenwriting career. It's in black and white. (Emma, screenwriter)

When considering what is accomplished by discourses connecting women with childcare, Janet Smithson and Elizabeth Stokoe have argued that:

It is in the on-going construction of social categories (such as 'professional worker', 'breadwinner', 'woman') and the activities and characteristics people link to them (like 'working all hours', 'caring', 'looking after children') that is central to the perpetuation of gendered assumptions and practices. (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005, p.152-153).

In addition, they explain, the more established a categorization and link, the more natural it appears and therefore the more invisible the construction. The capacity for biological motherhood has become intrinsically linked with a corresponding predisposition to nurture and care for others that is widely accepted as an essential part of being female. This was clearly demonstrated in my interviews with the UK film industry workers:

God, we're generalizing and it's so embarrassing, but women tend to be quite good at nurturing. (Eloise, employer)

Is there a nurturing aspect to this development side and women can feel drawn to that? Nursing a baby through production. (Jack, screenwriter)

I'm sure you've got the statistics, people go 'oh there's lots of female producers. They're nurturing. Producing is a nurturing thing.' (Laura, employer)

Conversely, men were firmly positioned as not being responsible for childcare:

With a man he's not looking after kids, he's not suddenly going to ring you up, can't deliver because somebody's ill, some kid's ill, you know? (Vicky, employer)

I've spoken to male writers who, as I say, are definitely very good at saying 'the wife and kids have to not bother me for the three weeks I'm working'. (Frank, employer)

Certainly there was little discussion of men having to compromise as a result of having children. Many were even explicit in suggesting that looking after children wasn't a problem that men faced:

...men tend not to take as much share of bringing up the children. That is a sort of shackle on, generally, across the whole of it women just generally have a bit less time. (Pete, employer)

That's the reason I'd love to be a man because actually I'd love to marry a woman who'd have kids for me and I could have that but I could go to work. (Pippa, employer)

The associated disruption to a woman's career was generally talked about as something to be expected and accepted, closing down possible discussions of whether this was fair, necessary or indeed alterable:

...obviously women's life is different to men's life because, well not all of them, but a substantial amount of them are going to become mothers and there's no question that that has a huge impact on your career and what you can do and what you can't do. (Eloise, employer)

I'm not saying women aren't committed but we've got all this other stuff going on and as you get older you do have children. (Emily, screenwriter)

Some female screenwriters had a rationale for their responsibilities for childcare that was framed as practical, with no recourse or acknowledgment of the role of gender norms in creating these different life narratives:

I feel like because I'm the person who manages to work from home, that I should be the one who does the juggling (Emma, screenwriter)

I think the fact that we've got children is the reason why I've allowed myself to be in a position where my husband is supporting me. (Fiona, screenwriter)

The impact of being taken out of the workforce for several years, or having to make compromises in your career was disarticulated by a discourse that actually worked to suggest that women could simply start or return to a screenwriting career once their children had grown up:

Well I started writing probably when he was ten. (Catherine, screenwriter)

...once they reached the age when they could go to school by themselves and come back by themselves I thought 'fantastic! I'm going to have so much more time, I'm going to be so much more productive' (Rachel, screenwriter)

Some female writers don't really start emerging until their kids have got to a certain age - you've got Jane Goldman who is somebody who has sort of waited for the kids to grow up before really throwing herself into the work (Frank, employer)

This discourse suggests that those who have succeeded in carving out a screenwriting career were perhaps free from having to worry about earning money during the early years of their children's lives, reinforcing the class advantage discussed in the previous chapter. Jane Goldman in particular, the screenwriter of "Kick-Ass" (Vaughn, 2010), "X-Men First Class" (Vaughn, 2011) and "The Woman in Black" (Watkins, 2012), amongst others, is exceptional in many ways. She is married to Jonathan Ross, a successful television personality who reviews films and interviews film directors and actors for a living. It is therefore possible to assume that she had some advantages when it came to getting introductions into the film world, and that she was also not reliant on earning an income whilst establishing her screenwriting career. Using Jane Goldman as an example of what is possible for female screenwriters fails to acknowledge that most women with children do not have her social or economic capital.

There were two male screenwriters that I talked to that did have some significant childcare responsibilities. Tony, in particular, found it very difficult to carry on working whilst being a caregiver:

Tony: I was [first child]'s primary carer and I was writing then, and it was very hard, totally hard.

Natalie: How were the hours broken down? When did you write?

Tony: [silence]

Natalie: Did you feel like you weren't getting enough time?

Tony: I wasn't getting enough time. And if it happened again, you know, the way I write now, before when I was younger it was an hour here, an hour there, you can get away with that. Now, it's whole days, into the evening, so how that's going to work out, I've no idea. That's why you've got to be paid properly.

Natalie: So have you not been in that situation since having [second child]?

Tony: No.

Robert found it less of a struggle since his child was school age by the time he took over as her primary carer, but relied on help from his family. The implication is that many parents who have responsibility for childcare can struggle to find adequate time to complete their work, especially when the children are small. Like all wage labour in a capitalist system, creative work relies on someone else to take care of domestic chores and responsibilities. However, my research supports the idea that men may not suffer from the same assumptions by potential employers as to their commitment or priorities, or have to juggle work and childcare as frequently as women. As Mark Banks and Kate Milestone convincingly demonstrate, men and women have become “more intensively ascribed with essentialized gender characteristics and the language of biological necessity” (Banks and Milestone, 2011, p.75), in order to justify the continued division of labour along gendered lines as not only necessary but desirable by individuals.

Whilst it may be a feminist ideal to break down gendered assumptions and problematize the idea of difference based on biological and essentialist notions, the reality for most women is that their potential to become mothers will be likely to affect assumptions made about them, and the reality of becoming a mother will have a significant effect on their career and earning potential. This is not the case for the vast majority of men who become fathers. Many of my participants, male and female, had explored ways to combine childcare responsibilities with the demands of work, with varying degrees of success, but all of them are working in the UK film industry. What of those whose voices are not captured because they have not been successful in finding a way to make it work? Might they account for some of the missing percentage of female screenwriters? In the second half of this chapter I will

explore in more detail the features of screenwriting work that make it particularly difficult for those with caring responsibilities. Before that, however, in next section I will turn to look at how these gendered assumptions, so resonant of feminist critiques of the enduring breadwinner model of work, might make it more difficult for women to position themselves as the ideal screenwriter.

6.1.2. Demonstrating commitment: the ideal screenwriter.

They don't actually want you to have a life.
(Screenwriter, Creative Skillset, 2008, p.8)

As I discussed in Chapter Four, one of the ways that my participants in the UK film industry identified suitable candidates for screenwriting work was through indications of their commitment to writing. This was evidenced through the ways that they demonstrated that writing took precedence over all other parts of their lives. By talking about working long and unsociable hours, screenwriters are able to position themselves as creatively driven in a way that is understood as stemming from natural talent. This discourse of the driven and committed creative individual has the effect of excluding anyone with other responsibilities or demands on their time. It is therefore very difficult for women with children to present themselves as ideal screenwriters. Although men may have children, and some of them may be struggling to find time to work, the dominant perception that women have an instinct to nurture, as discussed in the previous section, is perceived as being at odds with a commitment to a creative profession. Screenwriters are frequently discussed in my interviews as needing to put themselves and their work ahead of family life:

I know a writer that locks himself in his room and has nothing to do with his wife and children for the three weeks he wants to focus on something. He seems to be very good at cutting himself off that way.
(Frank, employer)

I think they can then use that as an excuse to say 'I really need my independence to be a writer, because I can't cope with this' whereas women don't tend to do that. Women don't normally walk away from their kids and say – well there have been examples - but on the whole they would try to work around the kids, whereas I think men are more likely to say 'you don't understand I'm a genius and my whole future's being bugged up by having to take little John to football.' (Freddie, screenwriter)

As can be seen by these examples, the two discourses of the need for solitude to be creative and women as more natural nurturers of children than men are very much tied together in UK film industry talk. Stephanie Taylor has shown how women struggle to position themselves as exemplary creative workers due to the conventional female requirement to be other-oriented (Taylor, 2010). In my examples above the use of this gendered assumption is that the speakers can argue that it is an apparently natural association rather than an unfairly gendered division of labour, which in turn exempts them from acknowledging the sexism in their talk, and of recognizing that something needs to change.

Some of my female participants described differences they observed between their own attitudes and those of their male partners when it comes to juggling work and family responsibilities, although notably, these real women are also working, unlike the women imagined by Frank and Freddie above:

I do think there's quite a difference watching my husband. I will go to work, go to a meeting and there'll still be in the back of my head 'I need to get home by five because really I need to make sure the nanny can get home on time and the kids need their tea and I need to get them to do their homework.' And that's all going on in the background and I don't think men - I think there are probably a few men who do that - but most of them don't. (Emily, screenwriter)

Yes of course, it's that whole guilt thing you have about leaving your kids and you're the one who's emotionally committed to them but of course the man is too. My husband just went away for four months to (city) to make this TV show and he was miserable, he hated it, but he did go. If I'd been offered it I would never take it in a second. But he goes away all the time for his work. (Nicola, employer)

These differences in concern for the children and related responsibilities are due to the socialized expectations of men and women as breadwinners and caregivers respectively, rather than due to any intrinsic disposition (Connell, 1985, Taylor, 2010). Both Emily and Nicola seemed to be aware of this but still found it difficult to escape the roles expected of them:

I find separating home and work quite difficult. I do have childcare luckily and a husband who will step in when needed but I think it's also a mental thing. I do find it hard to separate myself from my kids' social calendar. I'm still organizing play dates for them while I'm trying to juggle everything. And I think there still is that expectation on women to be perfect at everything. I think it's a social construct now that we have to be great mothers but it's still there. We have to bake the cakes, we have to organize play dates, practice the violin, do everything so well, oh and yeah there's this thing called a job and you

have to be brilliant at that as well. And it's exhausting. You eventually think I can't be bothered and it's usually the job that goes because the kids can't. (Emily, screenwriter)

You know I've got an amazing husband but I do everything to do with the kids, I'm organizing all of their lives at the same time as doing my job, at the same time as – and he's a brilliant dad, but why doesn't he know when their half terms is? We all get the same emails. I had a big row with him the other day he said 'when's half term'? I said 'I wrote it in my diary why didn't you write it in your diary?' And I think it's just a massive gender thing and it's the way society is and it comes up in every industry. (Nicola, employer)

In these examples there is a discourse of women as the default parent, the person responsible for staying on top of the many and varied demands of family life and for whom “the scope and volume of managing this many lives and details comes with a surprisingly huge emotional and mental exhaustion that is unique to the default parent (Blazoned, 2014). It is difficult for women to escape the role of having primary responsibility for children and family life, even when they are employed. There is practical and emotional work for women to do as they take on the burden of ensuring their children's activities live up to the child's and society's expectations, remembering commitments and continuing to smile as they juggle everything. On the other hand, Hannah, whose work had meant her spending some time away from her child, described how “you do end up feeling a bit guilty”, something none of the men I interviewed admitted to feeling. It seems that for many mothers, they are never completely off-duty. This discourse indicates the continuance of invisible female labour that can disadvantage women in the workplace. Indeed, even in the course of this study I found it difficult to articulate the many responsibilities that arise from being the primary carer for children. To talk about chores and childcare hardly seems to scratch the surface, as illustrated by Nicola and Emily above. I also felt this keenly in my own life whilst trying to complete my thesis. The inability to ever be free of thinking, planning, remembering and carrying out the associated responsibilities, from booking dentist appointments to buying presents for children's parties and the affective labour involved in smiling at the school gates and patiently putting aside your own work to help with homework or just give a cuddle has not

been sufficiently documented and requires further investigation outside the scope of this project.

In most professions it is a challenge to balance the needs of the workplace with the needs of children and this burden still falls most frequently on the shoulders of women (Kelan, 2008, McRobbie, 2009b, Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Even when an employer has an Equal Opportunities Policy, much of the work done by it is often to try to help women fit into jobs and professions constructed around a male life cycle (Liff and Cameron, 1997, Smithson and Stokoe, 2005, Wajcman, 1998). Measures such as part time, flexible hours and maternity pay attempt to accommodate the need for women to bear and raise children. However, workers doing less than full time hours are seen as less desirable and less worthy of pay and promotion. According to Women Like Us, an award-winning organization that helps women find work that fits with their new needs after having children, part-time work is overwhelmingly associated with low pay. Only three per cent of vacancies in London are for part-time roles paying over £20,000 FTE²⁹ (Stewart et al., 2012). Judy Wajcman argues when organizations write their Equal Opportunities Policy ‘by leaving full-time work as the dominant option ... [they] construct part-time work not merely as different but also as inferior.’ (Wajcman, 1998, p.27). Just as in my interviews on screenwriting labour, part-time hours are often seen as a sign that the worker isn’t fully committed to the job. In a post-Fordist labour market, employers appear to have become even more paranoid about their ability to get their money’s worth from employees:

...new employment relations still require the performance of a breadwinner mentality. This mentality is characterized by an individualized worker who can focus on work full-time. (Kelan, 2008, p.1172)

Some screenwriters do take on other work to support their career, but this is more difficult for women who have caring responsibilities:

²⁹ Full Time Equivalent

And therefore they are not really at liberty to say ‘I’ve got a MacJob for half a week so I can write the rest of the time’. You know, they’re doing other things, important things. (Pete, employer)

In fact, very few workers, inside and outside the UK film industry are able to get away with just ‘full-time’ hours – with work frequently bleeding into the evenings, the early mornings and the weekends, particularly with the nature of mobile technology and international relations across different time zones. Work on film productions is often acknowledged as involving excessive hours:

I thought I’d be able to go back ... and I’d kind of do a nine to five day. And then they weren’t able to keep the job within those hours. (Production Manager, Creative Skillset, 2008, p.11)

However, although screenwriting work is not as constrained by location or time-frame, my screenwriters often described working in a similar extreme manner:

No, no regular hours, even on the job I’m doing, as we know I’m supposed to have regular hours and then it all goes crazy. (Usma, screenwriter)

...if my deadline is looming and I can maybe do three all-nighters in the couple of weeks preceding. I’ve done that loads of time. So how many hours is that? 24 hours in some days possibly? It’s not, with breaks obviously for food or tea or whatever but you are nevertheless working 18, 19-hour days. (Catherine, screenwriter)

There were late night phone calls, there were trips out to Germany, there were trips up to London, there were suppers missed, and so on and so on (Will, screenwriter)

Jobs, and workers, are seen as gender-neutral concepts although in reality Joan Acker has shown that ‘both the concept of “a job” and real workers are deeply gendered and “bodied”’ (Acker, 1990, p.150). She argues that the abstract worker is expected to have ‘no sexuality, no emotions and does not procreate’ (Ibid, p.151) which helps to reproduce the idea that work is gender neutral but in reality:

Women’s bodies – female sexuality, their ability to procreate and their pregnancy, breast-feeding, and childcare, menstruation and mythic “emotionality” – are suspect, stigmatized and used as grounds for control and exclusion. (Ibid, p.152)

At the same time men ‘need not be involved in, or affected by, equality measures’ (Liff and Cameron, 1997, p.36). In *Managing like a man: women and men in corporate management*, Judy Wajcman convincingly demonstrates that managerial jobs ‘position

women as the problem and accept men's life experience as the norm' (1998, p.11). My research demonstrates that this argument is equally applicable to creative work. Wajcman observed the benefit that men receive in the workplace when they get married, and especially when they have children. There is an associated assumption that their wives will stay at home with the children that means that these men are perceived as being freed from other domestic responsibilities that might burden the single man – such as shopping for groceries, keeping the house clean and waiting in for deliveries and repairs. With someone else to take responsibility for these chores and more, men are perceived as being freed up to focus on work, thereby presenting as a more committed employee. Career women with children, however, can face the opposite assumption that they are bringing less to their jobs once they are married or have children – even when they remain full-time. The belief (and in many cases like my participants above, the reality) that women will be doing a 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1983b) of work and domestic responsibilities means that they are often perceived as not fully committed to their career, more likely to be running out of the door to pick up children from childcare and to stay at home when children are ill.

The social construction of 'jobs' already has within it the assumption that workers will be men and that these men will have wives to take care of their daily needs. (Wajcman, 1998, p.39)

One female film producer who is yet to have children of her own is quoted in the Creative Skillset and UK Film Council Report *Balancing Children and Work in the Audio Visual Industries* (2008) and freely admits:

I'd rather use a guy who has got no responsibilities and is available all the time... Completely no tolerance policy for me I'm afraid because it directly impacts on my business. (Creative Skillset and UK Film Council, 2008, p.8)

Although these assumptions fail to acknowledge that not all women are mothers, or that not all mothers are in heterosexual relationships and so do not necessarily have a man to 'look after' or are the ones doing the childcare, what is clear is that women are still struggling with

additional responsibilities in greater numbers than men, and that men are less likely to suffer adverse perception from employers.

In my sample, all except two of the male screenwriters had children who lived with them. Four of the female screenwriters didn't have children and three more had children but they were grown up. Wajcman claims that in order to succeed, women are required to become more like men. The reality for many women is that in order to succeed in many professions, they may find that they need to forgo having children (Creative Skillset and WFTV, 2009, Creative Skillset and UK Film Council, 2008, Wajcman, 1998). As Frank acknowledged, "Some female writers don't really start emerging until their kids have got to a certain age". Some of the women discussed with me how they had made decisions about when and whether to have children in direct relation to their careers, including one participant who spoke sadly about postponing children at a critical point in her career and then discovering that she had left it too late and was no longer able to conceive. One younger female screenwriter expressed concern about how it might affect her future career:

I've also spoken to (friends who are writers) who have said 'you won't write anything for the first five years of your child's life because you just won't do it'. You can't get round it, it just becomes too absorbing.... And I wouldn't want to lose that sort of part of myself because that's who I am. (Natasha, screenwriter)

As I outlined in the previous section, only two of my male screenwriter participants had significant responsibilities for childcare, and one of those was a single father with a child of school age. It was far more common for the female screenwriters to discuss how they navigated the demands of childcare.

I used to have very set hours because when my kids were smaller I used to take them to school and then come home and write frantically until the time when I had to go and pick them up in the afternoon. Um - then when they reached the age when they could go to school by themselves and come back by themselves I thought 'fantastic!' (Rachel, screenwriter)

When I was bringing him up and I was needing to do childcare, my career was so kind of scrappy that I was actually quite easy to fit in with childcare and in some ways it made, having the discipline of taking him to school and bringing him back, you know, I knew I had to work within those hours so that actually worked out. But no, I wasn't busy enough, I wasn't commissioned enough. (Usma, screenwriter)

I feel like because I'm the person who manages to work from home, that I should be the one who does the juggling. (Emma, screenwriter)

In direct contrast, the majority of the male screenwriters who had children had a partner who was doing the childcare, and it was clear that this directly enabled them to work:

I'm very grateful that I can jump on a train and go to a meeting with a director or pitch to a producer or even go to visit the set of a movie that's being made a lot more readily than my wife could in our current arrangement. (Will, screenwriter)

Natalie: Do you get tired of working evenings and weekends when you've got a family?

Jack: Yes it's tiring and deeply stressful because the wife is thinking 'when is this going to bear fruit? When is this going to pay off?' because I'm either working at it in family time or I'm distracted or bad-tempered or anxious or you know. So yeah it takes a toll.

It can be argued that most men (and some women) are required to sacrifice aspects of their personal life, and time spent with their children and families, in order to bear the burden of being the breadwinner and rise up the career ladder. However, whilst this might be deeply felt by individual men:

There is no trade union campaign about men's right to parental leave. There are no waves of sexism tribunals brought by dads whose employers are preventing them – but not their female colleagues – from balancing work with childcare. (Burrows, 2013)

In fact, 'our children's grandmothers are twice as likely to look after them during the day than their own fathers' (Ibid).

Figures published by the Commission for Equalities and Human Rights also show that "Mothers do three quarters of childcare during the week and two thirds during the week-end" (Commission for Equalities and Human Rights, 2007a, p.48). In the UK current government legislation allows men only two weeks off work after the birth of their baby, whilst women are allowed up to 52 weeks maternity leave. The situation looks likely to change from 2015 (BBC News, 2012). However with women still being socially constructed as more natural carers of children (Franks, 1999, Creative Skillset, 2008, Smithson and Stokoe, 2005), and paid less than men (Cohen and Huffman, 2003, Stewart et al., 2012), it remains to be seen whether this has any substantial effect in real terms. In Sweden, where parental leave can already be shared equally by mothers and fathers, it is still the norm for women to take most of the leave and then to return to work part time (BBC Radio 4, 2012).

Creative work as we have seen, is exemplified by characteristics that potentially offer an opportunity to work around other commitments, for example working without direct supervision, outside of an office, choosing your own hours and indeed having gaps between projects. It has therefore been assumed that this is more compatible with childcare responsibilities, as I demonstrated in the last chapter:

I would have thought it was easier to be a screenwriter in the industry than a director because that totally takes over your life. If you're a writer you have more control about when you do it and your own schedule, so I don't understand it. (Rob, employer)

Funnily enough writing is one of the few jobs you can do and be at home with your baby, once you've got over the idea 'I don't even know my name'. (Esther, screenwriter)

In the next section I will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which this ideal not only falls short of reality, but indeed, in an echo of Ros Gill's observations on the continuance of gendered inequality in the creative industries (Gill, 2002), it is these very traits of flexibility and informality that make it particularly difficult for those with childcare responsibilities.

6.2. The Cost of Creative Labour

I suppose I've nurtured my creativity rather than nurturing a baby.
(Creative Skillset and WFTV, 2009, Industry Culture and Attitudes)

In this section I will start to unpack some of the characteristics of apparently 'flexible' creative work to examine how they might disadvantage mothers in particular. Many academic accounts have argued that that the celebrated features of working in the new cultural industries, such as informality and flexibility 'are the very mechanisms through which inequality is reproduced' (Gill, 2002, p.86). The creative labour research highlights the general preponderance of certain characteristics, e.g. long hours and 'bulimic' (Pratt, 2000) patterns of working, poor pay, leisure and socializing as work, profound experiences of insecurity and anxiety about finding work, and has also noted the continuance of inequalities along the lines of age, gender, ethnicity and class. However, consideration of motherhood as

a cause of gender inequalities has been given scant attention in the academic literature, let alone how it intersects with other axes of inequality such as race and class.

In UK creative industry accounts there is some awareness of the difficulties of juggling work and childcare responsibilities (Sinclair et al., 2006, Creative Skillset, 2008, Creative Skillset and WFTV, 2009, Creative Skillset, 2010b) but these are not subject to any critical examination of the gendered assumptions behind these struggles. A recently published report commissioned by the Sundance Institute and Women In Film LA interviewed 51 female filmmakers and executives and 19.6% spontaneously mentioned families and childcare as hampering women's careers, (Smith et al., 2012, p.11). The fact that this percentage isn't higher most likely reflects the fact that many of these women will have had to forgo or postpone having children in order to succeed and therefore childcare isn't an issue.

I will demonstrate how the characteristics of creative labour, as exemplified by screenwriting, cause inequality of opportunity for those with childcare responsibilities, whom I have shown to be predominantly women. Film work is the epitome of flexible work as individuals and small or micro businesses come together for short periods of time on temporary projects (Deuze, 2010) and are seemingly free to work when and where they choose. However, Lisa Adkins has argued that it is only because women continue to assume responsibility for childcare and the home that men are able to take up these new flexible positions in the creative economy (Adkins, 1999). I will now examine in more detail three key aspects of creative work that apparently offer choice and control to the individual: freelance employment, informality and working outside an office. By drawing on the existing academic literature and bringing it into dialogue with film industry accounts from my own research, I hope to highlight the way that these characteristics actually create as many obstacles as opportunities for mothers.

6.2.1. The gendered dynamics of managing freelance, project-based work

For a woman who has to earn a living and has kids or dependents, I can imagine that working in film would be incredibly difficult because it's unreliable. (Sinclair et al., 2006, p.59)

Screenwriters are employed on a project by project basis, carry out the majority of the work on their own and are reasonably free, outside of financial considerations, as to where they do that work and when. Surely this is a profession that is more compatible with looking after children? As Denise Bielby asks:

Writing for film and television does not require long-term commitment to a single corporate employer. The work can be done in any setting during hours of the writers own choosing. Shouldn't Hollywood prove the exception to the glass ceiling faced by women in most professions? (Bielby, 2009, p.247)

As I have already shown, many of my participants echoed this view of the flexibility of the screenwriting profession:

Gillian: Sure, they might be doing a few other things, like picking up their children [laughs], or doing other readings.
Natalie: So you think they'd have time to do that?
Gillian: Yeah, of course.

Yep, if you've got children at nursery you can write from ten to two or whatever it is. (Pete, employer)

Writing is the perfect career for a woman who has children, because you can do it from home. (Pippa, employer)

My sample – and indeed the film industry as a whole – is made up of a majority of women who don't have children, and men. This constituency might not be aware of the precise difficulties of balancing work and childcare. Indeed, like successful male screenwriters, successful female screenwriters often have someone else who does the childcare for them. Leading UK screenwriter, Abi Morgan³⁰, interviewed for The Telegraph in 2011, describes herself as 'a relatively independent woman who has been able to combine a career with raising a family' but whilst 'the children are around' she also says 'I have a

³⁰ Writer of, amongst other films, "Shame" (*Shame*, 2011. Directed by MCQUEEN, S. Screenwriters: Abi Morgan, Steve McQueen: Momentum Pictures.), "The Iron Lady" (*The Iron Lady*, 2011. Directed by LLOYD, P. Screenwriter: Abi Morgan: The Weinstein Company.) and winner of several BAFTAs for her television work.

wonderfully supportive husband [Jacob Krichesfsta]. He's an actor so is often at home.' (Farndale, 2011).

My female screenwriting participants had help from various sources, but like Morgan, partners featured prominently:

My husband's cut down on his hours because he's, so he can do more kind of childcare and stuff (Tessa, screenwriter).

We have a nanny, and my mum. And my husband! ...he works four days so he takes one of the days when I'm not here. (Emily, screenwriter)

...my boyfriend is an actor so his work is similarly flexible. So I sort of feel like, if we did have a child, which we're hoping to do in the next not so many years, that we could kind of work it out. (Natasha, screenwriter)

It is harder to capture the data from those who might disagree with the view on the compatibility of screenwriting with parenting. These screenwriters may indeed have left or never entered the industry for this reason.

Look at all the execs that have left our industry around the time they had children. Why aren't they writing? (Laura, employer)

Laura recognized that she had only managed to balance her own unpredictable freelance career with having a family "because my partner has a steady job" and wondered what happens when "there's a man and he's trying to do it and not getting any development money what does he do? If he's trying to support a family?" This is another example of the discourse so prevalent in my interviews that women are expected to do the childcare, whatever else they might be doing. However, having children does not seem to prevent men from pursuing a screenwriting career in the same way that it does for women. It seems that for women flexible working has a much higher cost than it does for men. Interestingly, Laura went on to use class to understand this problem: "So then you get into class and the whole thing about film producers being trustafarian". A male screenwriter with children is understood as needing an additional source of income to support his career and his partner who looks after the children. As I discussed in Chapter 5, my participants often used class as a way to disarticulate possible sexism they have experienced or observed.

An examination of the way that screenwriting work is talked about can highlight the ways in which the view of screenwriting and parenthood as compatible can be challenged. For example, these are just some problems highlighted by my female screenwriters:

...they're worried their career will completely stall. (Catherine, screenwriter)

...five thirty to seven in the morning might be at the moment the best I'm going to get (Emma, screenwriter)

Um...at the moment because [child] doesn't really sleep, my brain isn't working that well so I can work til about nine, nine-thirty and then I stop. (Fiona, screenwriter)

Screenwriters interviewed for the UK Film Council's scoping study on women screenwriters articulate strikingly similar concerns:

The difference between your personal choices and your career is a really key one. Women who have kids have time out and time out can be quite fatal. You don't have a guaranteed slot waiting for you to come back into like people in employment do. There is a constant fear of 'if I drop out for a while, will I ever get back in?' (Screenwriter)

You can't suddenly say to the producer, 'From now on I just want to work two days a week.' (Screenwriter)

You need to be in that world. You can't just do it for one hour. So maybe that would be hard for a woman with kids. You need to be able to have at least four hours a day. (Screenwriter)

It's fine if your wife's at home putting the kids to bed, but what are you supposed to do if you are the wife? (Screenwriter)

(all quoted in Sinclair et al., 2006, p.59)

Not all the screenwriters felt the same way:

I think the work environment's wonderful because it's entirely at my own choosing. I get up in the morning and I go to work and then my children come home and I'm here. (Screenwriter) (Ibid)

However, the arrangement described in this example only becomes possible once all children are of school age, which could be over six years for a woman who has two children, two years apart. Up until that point, other forms of childcare are needed.

In *Having None of It* Susan Franks examines the conflicts between working and childcare responsibilities for women, arguing that flexible, freelance work like that of screenwriting can be difficult to combine with family life. She gives the example of home workers in the clothing manufacture trade who 'are subject to sudden deadlines where they must drop everything and work' just like screenwriters. 'Reconciling this with regular

childcare and children's routines can be difficult'. (Franks, 1999, p.90). Most formal childcare such as nurseries, nannies and child minders are not available on a supply and demand basis.

That was the big freelance thing in particular about the possibility of the ad hoc, and also long-term childcare about not knowing the hours and not knowing when, or wanting half a day sometimes, and how do you do that, unless you reach the point of having a full-time nanny but not necessarily having the full-time income to support it. (Freelance Worker, Creative Skillset, 2008, p.7)

One screenwriter, who doesn't live in the UK, was considering taking exceptional measures to find childcare:

...it sounds awful but there are so many illegals here who love cash jobs, so it's easy to get a Spanish, like, nanny or something who will help you out and like, for a day's work you're going to pay like £50 which is unheard of. (Tessa, screenwriter)

Another based in the UK had managed to find some flexible childcare that accommodated her unpredictable hours, but acknowledged the rarity of this:

I'm actually really lucky with the child-minder I've had that I arranged a basic with her of two days a week and she is flexible on the other days, so I've always been able to add days. But a lot of child-minders that I went to visit when I was choosing, one said 'I've got these two days available 'cos everything else is full' and that wouldn't have worked for me at all. (Fiona, screenwriter)

The precarity of her situation is passed onto the child minder, who is required to accommodate a varying income. Fiona also acknowledged that she could only cope with the fluctuations herself because she was married to someone who can support her, although this was something she struggled to reconcile with her own identity as a modern, working woman:

I think before we had children, he was encouraging me to leave my job and become an independent producer and do all the things I wanted to do but I couldn't really get my head round the idea of him supporting me. As soon as we had a child I thought, 'well you've got to anyway because I've got to take these nine months', so now's a good time to let me do that and you just suddenly understand that all his money is all ours and but it takes a little, it's hard to work that out. (Fiona, screenwriter)

Other screenwriters relied on informal childcare from friends and relatives:

Natalie: And who looks after your daughter when you work?

Hannah: Either my partner, or friends now. It's always been family or friends we've never had any professional help, not with housework or childcare, so it's always been, yeah.

When I'm away for work, which I've had to do a few times but not for very long - the longest was about three weeks - my wife's brother, my daughter's uncle lives around the corner so he tends to stay here then and do the childcare while I'm away. (Robert, screenwriter)

If you have pre-school age children, waiting lists for professional services can be long, often up to a year, and fees must be paid for every week, whether the parents are working or not. Clearly this is difficult if your work is project-based and not permanent. Mark Banks and Katie Milestone point out that “for employers, flexibility means that workers must give preference only to business priorities and duly contort themselves” (2011, p.82) leaving little control for the individual worker “over when and where they choose to execute their roles” (Ibid). Creative Skillset’s 2010 report on *Women in the Creative Media Industries* found that:

[...] representation is highest in sectors comprising larger employers in which more stable, permanent employment models are common, such as terrestrial television (48%), broadcast radio (47%), cinema exhibition (43%) and book publishing (61%). (Creative Skillset, 2010b, p.5)

In fact, a comparison of the data from the 2010 Creative Media Workforce Survey shows that in cinema exhibition, all the workers are permanent employees and 43% of them are women. In the facilities sector, where 7,750 of the 18,600 jobs are freelance, only 26% of the workers are women. (Ibid, p.9). Of course these figures don’t tell us the nature of these jobs, or what level of seniority or responsibility the women are at, but it is interesting to compare these figures with the fact that all film screenwriters are freelance and only around 11% of them are women (Lauzen, 2012, Lauzen, 2013a, Lauzen, 2014, Lauzen, 2015).

Many of my female participants who have children described difficulties connected to their ability to work. Many were afraid to take any time off due to the precarious nature of project-based work. Tessa described how she felt that she couldn’t take a break after having a baby:

I was really scared because I’ve spent such a long time trying to get momentum to my writing career. And you know I went through periods of really horrible, scary, dreadful poverty. (Tessa, screenwriter)

Fiona describes the particular challenges of creative work and being a young mother:

With producing it’s answering an email here, making a quick call, do this, you can dip in and out of it. With writing, you have got to be in the flow of it. So I’d say in the first six months of my baby’s life I didn’t write at all. (Fiona, screenwriter)

Hannah, who is a director as well as a screenwriter, described how she kept working through her child's earliest moments and uses a discourse of individual choice to account for not stopping:

My first feature I was eight months pregnant when I shot it, I breastfed through the edit, having done that, you know, having had a caesarean in between I just thought it was only going to get easier so I couldn't ever find any excuse not to, you know, I couldn't use her as an excuse anyway because it's what I wanted to do and I know she's proud of me and I'm passionate about my work and I just think that's as valuable as anything. (Hannah, screenwriter)

Some women appeared to put themselves through punishing schedules in order to be able to write and have children:

Emma: I like a regular writing schedule and to be honest what I'm doing at the moment is I think my regular writing schedule might be an hour or an hour and a half from five thirty to seven for four days a week just to, because it will add up.

Natalie: In the morning you mean?

Emma: Five thirty to seven in the morning might be at the moment the best I'm going to get.

I have friends who have children and basically what they have done – their children are much bigger, older now, but what they did in the early days was they would work in the night and then when baby was sleeping in the day they would sleep too. (Esther, screenwriter)

...after the kids are in bed at eight after a long day of looking after them, then as soon as they're in bed I turn on the computer. (Fiona, screenwriter)

With working lives like this, is it any wonder, therefore, that women may sometimes not be able to prove themselves as committed as their male equivalents?

I meet so many women who say 'I want to write an action movie', or 'I want to write a thriller' or 'I want to write this stuff' and I think actually there maybe is a factor, is that I also meet lots of male writers who also say that stuff and if no-one pays them to write it they go off and write it on spec and the female writers three years later they say 'I really want to write a thriller' and you're like 'why haven't you just written one to show you can do it, actually?' (Kate, producer)

These additional responsibilities faced by mothers are made invisible by the naturalization of motherhood, the expectation of total round the clock commitment by passionately devoted creative workers and the requirement that women put other's needs before their own "without protest" (Taylor, 2010, p.13). In the next section I will examine why finding creative work presents particular challenges for those with children to take care of.

6.2.2. The gendered dynamics of informal recruitment and working practices.

Women have children and um, I think that probably brings them to their senses, takes them, yes, just makes it too difficult to try. (Freddie, screenwriter)

As I have examined the outcomes of informal processes of procuring work in some detail in the previous chapter, in this section I will simply highlight the specific problems that arise from childcare responsibilities. As I have shown, most individuals working in the film industry are in a continuous process of searching for work, and that process is mainly an informal one done through socializing and making contacts 'on the job'. Clearly, in networking, opportunity is significant, and workers who are the primary carer for young children may not be available for networking events, which often take place outside work hours (Croft, 2001, Nixon, 2003).

...the writing is actually a very small part of the job, you've got to get out there and sell yourself and that's very difficult to do as most of it is social and in the evenings, and then you've got to pay babysitters, or your husband's got to be at home and he's not home by the time all the events start which is always six o'clock. Why? And it's like really simple things like if they held the event at 8 o'clock - you could go. Put the kids to bed and nip out. So very simple things like that could help. I think you'd see a rise in women at these events if they weren't at six o'clock. (Emily, screenwriter)

Yeah I try to imagine how it should be, like round each others houses until two in the morning, drinking whiskey, smoking cigarettes and arguing over lines and plots and things like that...I actually go to bed around nine or ten. 10pm is late now! (Tessa, screenwriter)

[Good screenwriters are] I guess the kind of people who you want to sit in a pub with for six hours. (Kate, employer)

Karen Campbell demonstrates that women's networks are restricted when they have young children. There was no correlating disparity for men who start a family (Campbell, 1988). The informal nature of work and recruitment in the UK film industry might seem at first to create a more accommodating environment, but that can be short-lived:

I remember the point when I stopped being able to take (child) to meetings, because he didn't just sit on my lap quietly. (Fiona, screenwriter)

...if you're at home, gonna get married, have kids, that's going to remove you from the world so it's going to be hard to stay focused on this (Jay, employer)

...obviously I'm breastfeeding so it doesn't always work out but I'm just kind of working a couple of hours a day at the moment. (Tessa, screenwriter)

One of my interviewees discussed the difficulty that informal networked recruitment practices can create for mothers who lose their jobs:

Suddenly I was there with no job and income and a child and I couldn't afford childcare - and you sit there waiting for responses and then you find yourself out of the loop, you're not aware of what they're commissioning. (Laura, employer)

A study by Jennifer Starr and Marcia Yudkin at the Wellesley Center for Women (Starr et al., 1996) shows that single women and all men have a different ability to allocate their time to business activities rather than domestic responsibilities than married women (Starr et al., 1996 referenced in Renzulli et al., 2000). It is also noteworthy that research shows that women receive less instrumental help from their network members, regardless of the status of themselves or those in their network (McGuire, 2002). Gail McGuire's suggestion is that women may be perceived as being less worthy of help as they are statistically less likely to be successful than men. It seems likely that the affects of motherhood on a woman's career may be contributing to this:

...career women are well aware that taking up these [maternity] leave entitlements serves to confirm men's view that women as a sex are not suited to managerial work. (Wajcman 1998, p.26)

However, it is very difficult for individuals to challenge these difficulties or structural inequalities in informal employment processes where there is often no recourse to equal opportunities policies and Human Resources departments, let alone complaints and tribunals.

We don't even have an HR department. You know, just the way that film companies are managed and run it's all very entrepreneurial, then it kind of grows and it's all a bit ad hoc, lot's of proper, we don't have benefits. So I think that just exacerbates the whole thing. (Gillian, employer)

Indeed, individuals may err on the side of caution, given that "Informal working cultures play an important part in shaping norms of what appears to be reasonable and fair behaviour, even when this departs from statutory obligations" (Thomson, 2011, p.16). Job seekers cannot afford to disadvantage themselves by appearing to require special treatment, particularly in a profession where ability is identified at least partly by the overt appearance of excessive commitment:

You can pick up people are just not quite committed for some reason. Which could be anything. It could be too busy, could be family stuff, could be other stuff going on in their life, you don't know. I think you can pick up their ambivalence a bit. (Gillian, employer)

A professional and devoted attitude was understood by both the screenwriters and their employers as an attribute of the ideal screenwriting candidate as can clearly be identified in their talk:

...from a producer's standpoint you want writers who are punctual, who answer their emails, who do their work quickly. (Patrick, screenwriter)

...they're looking for someone they trust to deliver. (Ed, screenwriter)

...on a professional level for me there's an element of pragmatism I'm looking for which is about getting the job done and getting the film made (Frank, employer)

...you know it's someone who is very willing to collaborate, isn't defensive and is very willing to rewrite and rewrite and rewrite and finds energy to do that. (Laura, employer)

Once again within this discourse, there is an implied suggestion that the ideal screenwriter is free of other commitments, and the use of notions such as 'trust' and being 'willing' again suggest that women may be judged as less suitable simply by their physical ability to possibly, one day, procreate.

6.2.3. The gendered dynamics of creative freedom.

...selfishness is required and a lack of encumbrance in other parts of your life is required (Will, screenwriter)

In this final section I want to touch briefly on how working outside a formal nine-to-five corporate environment might differently affect men and women pursuing a creative career. Screenwriters aren't required to work in an office or keep particular set hours. Indeed, they are expected to be working on more than one project at once, as that gives them more cultural capital which the employers can use for their own comfort and to sell the script to other partners. This means that they have the potential flexibility to juggle other responsibilities away from the eyes of their employer who isn't sure when they are working and often doesn't really care:

As long as someone delivers it doesn't matter what they do. (Nick, employer)

No, I couldn't care less. It makes no difference to me whatsoever. They could spend 10 minutes. They could spend 10 weeks. (Paul, employer)

However, it can also lead to an increased difficulty in carving time out for writing work, especially for those who are still trying to establish their career. Far from being viewed as a benefit, working from home was perceived as an obstacle to work for some of the women in my research. As shown above, Emma felt that since she was based at home, she ought to "be the one who does the juggling". Similarly, Emily attributed her difficulty separating home and work to the fact that she works at home:

You know, I'm there when they come home from school, even though I have an office at the end of the garden, they'll still come and see me when they get home because I'm there. (Emily, screenwriter)

Fiona described the complex dynamics of trying to work with small children:

At the moment I can only work when (first child) goes to nursery three days a week and I can only work when (second child) is asleep. I take her to meetings and I can do phone calls and things, but if she's awake I wouldn't sit and stare at my computer. (Fiona, screenwriter)

Emma, who writes from five thirty to seven every morning claimed that she needed this regular schedule otherwise "anything else will take over. You know, projects' you're working on for other people, family stuff." Only when the whole household was asleep was she able to prioritise her writing. Fiona also tried to make sense of the fact that being a mother meant not being able to work directly with the director who was rewriting her screenplay:

I just can't do anything for the next six months - it's the equivalent of me and he sitting down together and doing the work and I can't - he's in (country) and I've got a baby. So, I'm happy to let him do it but I think if I wasn't a producer I'd be finding that really hard. (Fiona, screenwriter)

The male screenwriters with young children didn't express the same concerns. Jack proudly told me that he picked the children up from school on Fridays, even though he was often "working at it in family time". Will enjoyed being able to have lunch with his wife and children, presumably before returning to his desk. Frank described "male writers who, as I say, are definitely very good at saying 'the wife and kids have not to bother me for the three

weeks I'm working", whereas Nicola, an employer who has children herself, understood the challenges faced by women screenwriters:

As a screenwriter you're working from home so 'why can't you pick them up from school?' and 'how come you can't go to this play date?' and I imagine that is quite difficult and screenwriters don't earn a lot of money and if their husbands are earning more money they'll be like with the screenwriting 'should I give it up and look after the kids?' or 'should I do it in the evening?' and if you look after kids you're so tired and the idea that you can then sit down and write after you put the kids down at 8.30, it's so exhausting. (Nicola, employer)

Even in households where both parents are working, women still find themselves doing the majority of domestic chores (Cameron and Kulick, 2003). Therefore chores, like childcare, could be challenging for women who work from home to escape responsibility for. Of those who talked about other domestic chores, four of the women I spoke to said that they did 95% or all of the chores, whereas the men were more likely to claim that they were shared ("She might tell you different." (Ed, screenwriter)). By contrast, many of the women who are working as screenwriters also commonly claimed to be markedly undomesticated and exist without worrying about chores too much:

I live in chaos most of the time (Catherine, screenwriter)

Neither of us are particularly house proud so we probably do the minimum. (Usma, screenwriter)

I'm not very domesticated. (Hannah, screenwriter)

We live in quite a messy house. (Fiona, screenwriter)

This discourse of non-domesticity potentially suggests that these chores are not terribly compatible with a screenwriting career, although the benefits of this incompatibility were noted by Catherine, who lives alone: "when I'm on a deadline and then my house is astonishingly tidy because I would rather tidy than sit down and you know, do it."

The very serious consequence of such gendered approaches to creativity and family life is that for female writers "the institution of marriage and family often conflicted with their career path as writers" (Pohlman, 1996, p.21) echoing Stephanie Taylor's (2010) work on artists. Livia Pohlman studied the effect that having children had on twenty contemporary novelists, and her research has notable echoes of my own. Of the nine male writers she

interviewed, seven had families by the time they were thirty. Their wives provided practical support in terms of childcare and household labour – these men weren't required to see flexible, creative work as a means to juggle these responsibilities, despite the fact that eight of the nine men worked from home. A base of stability allowed them to focus on creative work and eight of the nine had a private den or office in which to work. Conversely, out of the eleven female novelists interviewed, nine expressed concern that having a family would decrease their productivity and four did not have children, two of these having made the decision not to have children in order to focus on their career. The female writers with children complained of a loss of freedom, concentration and time to be creative. They suffered sleep deprivation and a feeling of isolation. In stark contrast to the male writers' experience, the female writers describe their partners' attitudes in terms of tolerance rather than outright support. Most tellingly, perhaps, with Virginia Woolf's voice ringing loudly in our ears, only one of the seven mothers had 'a room of their own' in which to work. Both my screenwriter participants and the women in Livia Pohlman's study find the demands of domesticity, particularly childcare to be at odds with their writing ambitions, and frequently describe losing valuable time and space to their other 'responsibilities'.

6.3. Conclusion

In 1938 Cyril Connolly wrote '...there is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall.' (Connolly, 1938, p.109-110). More recently, novelist Maggie O'Farrell challenged this assumption and those anxious to convince her that 'Every baby costs you a book, you know!'(O'Farrell, 2003). It's not inconceivable for a woman to have children and a lucrative creative career, but, just like women in senior management who have children, they are not in the majority. How motherhood affects creative careers is a difficult problem to research, since first hand accounts of those working in creative professions like film and novel

writing are limited to those who have ostensibly ‘made it’ and therefore do not allow a framework that can account for those women who are not present, and the reasons for this. Rachel Thomson argues that “for many the ‘motherhood penalty’ is a shock faced in relative isolation” (Thomson, 2011, p.16) and so presents difficulties for those trying to recognise or resolve the issue. Motherhood therefore risks becoming a hidden, forgotten cause of inequalities in the creative industries, and indeed in the wider workforce. O’Farrell’s ability to find successful mothers who manage to continue writing (O’Farrell, 2003), and even flourish after having children calls to mind feminist questioning of the universal commonality within the category of ‘woman’ (Butler, 1990), but fail to take into account the ways that class, degree of previous success and indeed age may play a part in who succeeds in juggling these responsibilities and who is lost. The reality for most working women, as I have demonstrated, is that they continue to risk disadvantage in at least three distinct ways linked to motherhood. They will likely be perceived as potential mothers, whether they want children or not and therefore viewed as less committed and less worthy of investment; they may very well need to make a choice between having children or having a career, unlike most men; and if they do have children, they will most certainly be expected to make personal and professional sacrifices that fathers are not routinely required to make.

In the UK, motherhood and having children is still regarded as a personal choice (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005) with little regard to the necessity of a continuing supply of taxpayers to support the needs of an – increasingly – ageing population. Keeping work and family separate ignores this consideration and ensures anyone with childcare responsibilities will have difficulties maintaining the perception that they are the ideal worker for a job – committed and always available. Whilst this clearly has the most impact on women who still bear the burden of most of the childcare in the UK, let us not forget that it also impacts significantly on children and fathers, who are unlikely to see each other as much as they

might like. By bringing together thinking from different academic fields such as gender and work, creative industries, maternal studies and work and organizations, along with new evidence from my own research, I have argued that the real cost of motherhood risks becoming the forgotten or side-lined aspect of gender inequality in the work place. I have also demonstrated that whilst women are viewed as naturally nurturing and as prioritizing this over their own creative fulfilment by choice, men are allowed to flourish creatively without compromise when they become parents. This in turn enables a reinforcement of the idea that to be creative you must be totally committed at the expense of other aspects of life, and anyone unable to demonstrate this single-minded commitment may be viewed as a less than ideal candidate for creative work such as screenwriting. In my conversation with him, Patrick attributed his big break to being able to give up his 'day job' and devote himself full-time to screenwriting. He describes a producer telling him:

He said 'look, it's ok, it's good, but you should be doing this full time.' He said 'you're either in or you're out with this game' (Patrick, screenwriter).

As long as this remains the expectation of employers, and as long as women are positioned as the more natural caregivers of young children, motherhood will continue to present significant obstacles for women seeking careers in screenwriting.

In my final analysis chapter I build on aspects of the three previous chapters and draw on Pierre Bourdieu to examine the role of habitus and embodied capital in upholding inequalities in screenwriting work. Building on his arguments about the social construction of taste I consider the gendered dimensions of film industry judgments of taste.

7: THE GAME OF THE UK FILM INDUSTRY

I think wherever you come from is going to inform your writing and your gender is a massive difference, or a massive specific in your life.

(Kate, employer)

In the previous chapters I have touched upon some of the ways in which embodied capital has an impact on the employment prospects for screenwriters in the UK film industry. Chapter Four demonstrated that homophily is a key mechanism through which screenwriters are able to establish the respect and trust necessary to secure employment. Chapter Five provided evidence of how social similarity facilitates advantage within the film industry's informal recruitment practices. In Chapter Six I discussed how women are discursively positioned as having different priorities and predispositions from men. Pierre Bourdieu's theories offer a way to link all these contexts of screenwriting work to better understand continued inequality of opportunity. For Bourdieu, an individual's social, economic, and cultural capital, along with their dispositions, taste, preferences and interests can be understood as socially constituted capacities that operate at a subconscious level and are embodied on a person in a way that makes them appear natural (1977). Whilst Bourdieu's work focuses predominantly on class difference, this chapter will follow feminist arguments outlined in Chapter Two that his ideas are equally useful for analysing gender. In particular, his concept of the habitus enables an understanding of both how an individual's interests and skills are socially constructed and how (as a result) men and women experience the world differently. People are socialized to act in certain ways and their resulting habitus can delimit an individual's potential for action within a field.

This chapter examines the way Bourdieu's thinking can be usefully applied to understand how gendered inequalities in screenwriting work happen in practice. The first half will explore how a female habitus makes success more difficult for women screenwriters as they may not be perceived by potential employers to have the right 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.6) - or indeed may themselves not feel that they fit in to the film

environment as easily as men. The second half of the chapter considers how taste is constructed as part of the gendered socialization process and how this leads to discernable consequences for women seeking to make a living in creative professions such as screenwriting. I show how Bourdieu's concepts are useful not only for understanding why there are fewer female screenwriters than male screenwriters, but also why the situation is changing so little despite increasingly widespread acknowledgement of continued inequality.

7.1 Bourdieu and gender as both constructed and lived.

Natalie: Do you think it makes any difference whether you're a man or a woman as a screenwriter?

Kate: ...Yes. Um - I think it sort of makes a difference in everything in the world [laughs]. I can't sort of define what the difference is...

Although the commonality of the experience of women has rightly been called into question (Butler, 1990), the continued difficulty in escaping a gendered identity means that individuals can experience life as gendered. Laura illustrates the difficulty of stepping outside expected gendered roles and professions:

I would welcome more female directors although I worry that some of the women I meet who are super successful feel slightly not true to their own nature, or, it's like they're aping a way of behaviour, perhaps because they think that's the only way it will work. (Laura, employer)

In the quotation at the start of this section, Kate's failure to articulate her understanding of gender differences may reflect the variety of the female experience but it is also a sign that the way men and women may come to experience the world differently can be subtle and inscribed into everyday actions and interactions in a way that makes it difficult to observe and talk about. Pierre Bourdieu's focus on the minutiae of the social world as a site for analysis is helpful in making some of these experiences visible. Bourdieu has received much criticism for his lack of consideration of gender. It has been suggested that he positions sexuality and gender (and race) as secondary to class (Lovell, 2000). However, feminist scholars have begun to recognize the usefulness of Bourdieu's thinking for understanding gender inequality and have sought to employ his theories through a feminist lens. A good

example of the possibilities can be found in ‘Feminism After Bourdieu’, edited by Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs (2004), which brings together a collection of critical feminist thinking which is “deploying, recasting, criticizing and extending the abundant theoretical resources his sociology offers” (Bilge, 2006).

To demonstrate the usefulness of Bourdieu’s work to an understanding of gender, I draw in this chapter, as I do in Chapter Two, on an article by Toril Moi: “Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of culture” (1991). Moi outlines a way to use an understanding of gender habitus to demonstrate how symbolic violence is used to suppress the very discourse of the experience of women. This is particularly useful in theorizing why women’s voices may not be considered as worthwhile as men’s and why female screenwriters, and their stories, are not seen on our screens as often:

The right to speak, legitimacy, is invested in those agents recognized by the field as powerful possessors of capital. Such individuals become spokespersons for the doxa³¹ and struggle to relegate challengers to their positions as heterodox, as lacking in capital, as individuals whom one cannot credit with the right to speak. (Ibid, p.1022)

Moi argues that gender has much in common with Bourdieu’s concept of class: it is perceived as natural and self-evident, it is socially and historically reproduced, embodied, and renders an individual open to judgement:

...to produce gender habitus requires an extremely elaborate social process of education and inscription of social power relations on the body, so even such basic activities as teaching children how to move, dress and eat are thoroughly political. (Ibid, p.1030)

As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, gender is understood as socially constructed. It is something that has to be learned but is not a fixed set of rules and indeed changes according to *where* and *when* you are. Bourdieu’s theory of preferences and skills as socially constructed and then naturalized in an individual’s habitus, is particularly relevant to understanding why girls might steer away from STEM³² careers (O’Mara, 2014), or why they might choose to write with a pink pen (Furness, 2012b). It is a useful concept for shedding

³¹ For Bourdieu, ‘doxa’ is the term used to denote what is taken for granted in any particular society (Bourdieu, 1972).

³² Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

light on how both men and women accept gender differences as normal and acceptable. The habitus internalizes the structure in which it grows up. Individuals acquire a sense of ‘belonging’ or ‘otherness’ in certain situations that influences their ability to act entirely freely in their choices. Steph Lawler has argued that what gives habitus its power is that the individual is judged by others not for what they do or have, but for who they apparently are, making it much harder to overcome the perceptions and assumptions of others. (2004, p.112)

This section examines how the gendered assumptions and behaviours inscribed in an individual’s habitus can contribute to different outcomes in the screenwriting labour market. Beginning by looking more closely at how my participants talked about belonging (or otherwise), I will show how women are more likely to be both perceived as, and feel like, outsiders. I will then look more closely at how habitus may impact on opportunity by examining the mechanisms of the screenwriter/director relationship as discussed by my participants.

7.1.1. Taking part.

People that knew more than me, were more experienced, that [sic] were practically always male and didn’t seem to care for me very much. And there were moments when I thought: this isn’t the game for me; this isn’t the environment for me. (Hannah, screenwriter)

In this extract from our conversation, Hannah articulates how, on attempting to establish a career in the film industry, she was aware of feeling different to those already working there. She foregrounds gender as a noticeable point of difference, and links it to the idea that she lacks experience and does not feel welcomed. Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus, which he has described as ‘a feel for the game’ (1990, p.6) is echoed in her concern that ‘this isn’t the game for me’. Hannah previously had a long and successful career as a writer in a different medium. Her feelings of being out of place can be understood as not about her

inexperience as a screenwriter, but about this new ‘environment’ and feeling like an outsider.

She isn’t alone.

...if you’re like a twenty year old all you hear are men’s names, and all the big screenwriters and all the big directors. So you just think ‘wow, I’m going to go into this industry and it’s all guys. Am I ready for that?’ (Emily, screenwriter)

Screenwriter and showrunner³³ Lena Dunham echoes this in an interview:

I think people don’t always recognize that if a young woman is looking at the landscape of Hollywood, what they see are almost only challenges, and so they might say ‘that’s not where I want to go. I want to go where there’s a space for me’ (Simmons, 2014)

Feeling out of place or unwelcome is not always in response to overt exclusion. As Terry

Lovell argues:

In modern/postmodern society there are few remaining ‘games’ (‘social fields of practice’) fully reserved for men, from which women are formally excluded, although many in which we are not exactly welcomed or taken seriously as players. (2000, p.12)

Lovell criticizes Bourdieu’s theories as being overly structural with little room for individual agency. However, as can be understood from her own example of Rosa Parks freely choosing to sit in the ‘white’ section of the bus, the possibility of social transformation is accompanied by significant difficulties for any individual that undertakes it. Individual resistance rarely leads to systemic change (Skeggs, 1997). This can help explain why individual women having successful film careers has not changed the overall numbers or attitudes.

Keith Randle, Cynthia Forson and Moira Calveley have convincingly demonstrated that habitus is used in the socialization process of UK film and television labour markets (Randle et al., 2014). As I have shown, employers looking for assurance in their choice of screenwriter fall back on homophily as recognized through the habitus. Even for individuals who do find a way into the industries, make contacts and find paid work, “details such as who one’s friends are, dress codes or accent can all be examined for sociological clues” (Ibid, p.6) and consequently limit access to the most lucrative networks and opportunities (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). Creative work is contingent on subjective and situated judgements about

³³ In the United States television industry, but increasingly in the UK too, a showrunner is the creator of a television show who acts both as lead writer and executive producer.

what constitutes artistic merit and whose ideas are worth funding and promoting. As earlier chapters have shown, access to creative work is unequally distributed along lines of gender, race and class, and the recognition of merit and ability is often marked by an individual's position on these axes. Irene Grugulis and Dimitrinka Stoyanova note in their study of film industry networks that outsiders were identified by their habitus:

They were not the 'right' gender or race, and they did not have the right accents, hairstyles, clothes or backgrounds to join the best networks. Being kept outside these social groups excluded them from jobs. (2012, p.1326)

Bourdieu's theoretical analysis of the details of social life allows an approach that considers these factors as indicators of power and position.

An awareness of being different or not fitting in due to gender, race, class, dress, social habits and interests was noticeable in the talk of those of my participants whose backgrounds were not typical of the film industry, as described in Chapter 5. For example:

...you go into a room full of dark-suited men. It could be as hard as that. It could be sort of we've got a choice between this guy – you know people also pick people that they want to have dinner with, you know? And I think maybe a male writer might have more of an air of somebody they can hang out with, go and smoke a pipe with or whatever it is. (Vicky, employer)

I think it's just a human instinct to work with people that you're comfortable with and you're used to having around and when a young, Indian woman comes in and says 'I'm a film producer', they haven't seen a young, Indian woman producer before. (Pippa, employer)

This awareness is in stark contrast to a prevalent discourse in my participants' talk that endorsed the advantages of working with partners who share your sensibilities, alongside a suggestion that when this commonality is absent, the project can suffer:

The projects I've had that haven't worked, I look back on them and there are parts of the problem would be, you know, among other things, your relationship with the producer just isn't right and you're not seeing eye to eye on the project, you're talking at cross purposes, etc., etc. so it just helps, knowing, just knowing that you're on the same page and your references are the same references, that you like the same films, that the vision of project, you've both got the same thing in mind for it, etc., etc., You don't have to be friends with them but I find that the two go hand in hand. (Patrick, screenwriter)

Natalie: What makes for a good working relationship?
Paul: Shared sensibility. For starters. I think.

This key to a good working relationship was often expressed as an ability to comfortably spend time together. In this way the reliance on a shared habitus is disguised and

the speakers avoid potentially offensive references to differences of appearance or background:

...the relationship feels better if you're comfortable being in a room together. (Frank, employer)

The Line Producer on (Film) gave me a piece of advice, which I think is genius, which is 'don't ever make a film with people that you wouldn't choose to go on holiday with'. (Frankie, screenwriter)

I guess it's a lot about communication and personality, you know, making film is really hard, and so if you set out on that journey with somebody who you just don't quite get on with, or who is difficult to deal with, then it can make it so much more painful. (Vanessa, employer)

Indeed the word 'relationship' appears to have a particular discursive function in many of my interviews:

...I form relationships with people and we stick together, not in the way, not in the great way that maybe Paul Laverty and Ken Loach have done, or, you know because that's a fantastic relationship, I don't have a relationship with a director like that and I wish I did, but I do have very, very strong and enduring relationships with producers. (Catherine, screenwriter)

It's just so much harder if you don't have that relationship with private school producers. (Emma, screenwriter)

It's two things isn't it? It's the relationship and their idea. (Gillian, employer)

In an informal labour market, having contacts or knowing names is not sufficient to secure work. By using the term 'relationship' my research participants are suggesting something deeper and more meaningful that is sustained over time. In a network culture, multiplex ties, i.e. being friends with the person who can potentially employ you, gives greater results but is more frequently experienced by men (Ibarra, 1992), since men are more frequently found in senior positions with a responsibility for hiring and homophily is so important in recruitment processes as I have shown. Using the word 'relationship' can potentially allow the speaker to convey a sense of being close to their connections and additionally conveying themselves as having the right social capital and habitus.

Many employers described the recognition of shared sensibilities and interests that lead to good work as being instinctive:

I think when you're, it's an instinctual thing when you talk to them, you've got that connection to them, and you feel like when you're discussing a project it can progress in the right way. (Colin, employer)

...you just have a connection. (Gillian, employer)

There were various things that we just connected on and kind of understood each other. (Jo, employer)

There were also references to ‘chemistry’, in a use normally associated with romantic relationships but similarly viewed as instinctual and corporeal as opposed to a conscious intellectual judgement:

...so I think for me I try to see if that chemistry works (Jay, employer)

I think a lot of it is just chemistry, you know, you meet someone you feel like you’re on the same page, you get on with them. (Pippa, employer)

This naturalizes and individualizes a selection process which favours others with similar backgrounds, and shows how an understanding of the habitus could draw attention to potentially unconscious processes of discrimination, sometimes called ‘implicit bias’ (Greenwald and Banaji, 2013).

However, in my research this need for social similarity was not limited to the people involved in the process but also extended to the creative work itself. In this extract from my conversation with Nick, he describes how the success of HBO’s television series “Girls” (Dunham, 2012), had sparked a desire at his production company to work with a young female screenwriter in the UK:

We get a directive from [head of company] saying, ‘Okay, we need to be writing, we need to be working with hot young female writers, writing truthful, honest stories about what it means to be a modern woman’. Well, you know, no shit Sherlock, but those sort of writers, you know - male or female - who can write something urgent and Zeitgeist-y don’t grow on trees, but we’ll have a look. So we did actively throw the net out to find that female writer in the UK, and we talked about ideas and worlds for stories and, heard some interesting pitches and had some interesting discussions. Ultimately, nothing that came through the door was quite right for - you know there’s a difference between [head of company] saying something like that and putting his money where his mouth is. You know ‘that’s just going to be a story about peace-loving hipsters and periods’. Well, what d’you bloody want? (Nick, employer)

The reference to menstruation by Nick’s employer (or at least in Nick’s interpretation of his boss’s reaction) indicates a gendered judgement of the female screenwriters’ story ideas.

Menstruation is something that can be viewed as both a natural part of being a woman but is socially positioned as shameful and needing to be kept hidden (Laws, 1990). The suggestion is clear: Nick’s male employer found the female story ideas distasteful. I will explore the

impact of differences in taste in more detail in the second half of this chapter. What is important here in the context of habitus and employment opportunities is the way this example shows how it can be difficult for an individual to understand the importance of an experience which is not familiar to them and how this can work to disadvantage women. Indeed the fact that so many stories apparently made for and by women are romances (Smith and Cook, 2008) may have more to do with this being a point of intersection of the female experience in a heterosexual male lifespan. If there really was a space for women to explore their concerns and experiences, would it not include more films about motherhood, for example? BAME writers in my study bemoaned the assumption that they will write about crime and poverty, perceiving that this is what white people are interested in and doesn't reflect their own experience and interests:

I think for BAME talent the perception is that we've only got one story to tell, that is 'drugs and guns and council estates'. And I know very little about council estates or drugs or guns so the difficulty BAME writers have is changing the perception of what they can do and changing the perception of yes there is a working class and those stories absolutely should be told, but what we'd like to see is a much wider palate of life. (Esther, screenwriter)

One of the most interesting and alarming conversations I had in the last few years was with [head of core institution] - she had read a few things of mine but was kind of confused, she couldn't understand, I think, why I wasn't doing socially-worthy, social realism stories about immigrants. Why I was doing genre, why I had written a romantic comedy and the thing I was pitching was a psychological horror. It was almost like, you know, why are you doing this? (Usma, screenwriter)

There is a strong suggestion that commissioners may find it hard to recognise the value of stories that do not reflect their own view of the world. Whilst it might be tempting to attribute this to perceptions about who writes what, I believe my research suggests more than that. The commissioners and financiers find it hard to see the value of stories told from a perspective that they don't share. Women and BAME writers are othered and not allowed to tell the same kinds of stories as white men. Hannah describes facing such a lack of understanding in her work, which seems strongly rooted in a lack of shared habitus:

Suddenly we were having those kind of debates about how the characters would behave and I have to say that really shocked me - I was kind of 'what do you mean you don't understand her?' 'Yes, but I don't get that', 'Well, yes, you're not a woman, so maybe that's all right if you don't get it.' (Hannah, screenwriter)

As suggested by this quotation from Hannah, this lack of comprehension of lived experience also extends to the types of roles women are allowed to embody on screen. Some of my female participants talked about struggles they had while developing their screenplay projects with male collaborators. They spoke of conflicting ideas about the truthfulness and believability of female characters:

...once we get onto the female roles and I'm going 'no, no, no, she wouldn't say that' and they're going 'why not, but that's my fantasy woman' and I'm saying 'but that's really disgusting and I'm not going to put it in my script' (Emily, screenwriter)

I've actually been, I worked with a writer/director on a film and we got shortlisted for a fund, and this was quite interesting, she'd written this female lead woman who was a fighter, you know she was spunky, she was the kind of girl, she had it all. She was good looking, she was confident, and I'm interested in you! And all the male readers of that script passed on it. Every male reader said: 'I hate this'. 'I hate this woman'. 'I don't want to see her made'. And it was quite a shock to my system because I'm like 'God, I LOVE her', what a great character! She's someone I could never be, and a lot of women are going to identify with her. I mean this woman was like a lot of male characters, a lot of guys, so you know she was spunky, she's got something to say and she's got attitude. And it was quite interesting I think all her, I think one of her mentors was a male writer/director and he said 'I hate this character' and she immediately, as the writer, froze and was totally devastated (Vicky, employer)

In this last extract, it is clear that Vicky, a female producer, shared an interest in and appreciation of her female screenwriter's character. However, even men working in one of the lowest paid positions, as script readers, feel able to express subjective gendered opinions as valid criticisms that might influence the future of the project and the confidence of the screenwriter. One female screenwriter even described being asked by a male director to remove the female characters and turn the lead into a man:

He wanted me to take away every female character in the script. He wanted to turn [male character] into one of the biggest characters in the script. And I turned round and I was like: No. I'm not doing any of these changes. Everyone loves the script. I've won like a fucking award for this script. I'm not doing it. (Tessa, screenwriter)

She was subsequently removed as the screenwriter. In this way, the commissioning and script approval/acquisition process edits out certain types of stories, characters and is likely to have an effect on the careers of those who write them, as it did for Tessa. Some participants expressed criticisms of certain male screenwriters' portrayal of female characters, perhaps for the same reason. Gender seen through the eyes of another does not always seem to match up to lived experience.

And there [are] some male writers who continually put out these hackneyed ideas of women. Writers like David Hare, who create women who are incredibly sexy and high up in politics – right. And she can run in heels. Well done her. And very sexually available. You know there's just, it's not real. This woman doesn't have a dishwasher to empty, I don't believe in her. (Natasha, screenwriter)

It's very interesting because everyone lauded him at first because he could write such amazing female characters and he was always writing about females on the verge of their sexual awakening or something. And I read his stuff and I was like 'this is kind of gross'. One, I don't relate to it at all, about like, weird stuff like, you know, girls talking about their nipples looking like raspberries or whatever and I was like 'I don't relate to that. I don't think it's very accurate'. And I think the people who were going on about how he's writing so well about teenage girls are actually men. (Tessa, screenwriter)

All of these examples are discussing subjective judgements of character and illustrate how the value or merit of different components of film scripts changes depending on who is assessing them. The gendered dimensions of this are difficult to ignore.

...it's also one of the frustrating things when you go in and you're sitting in a room with a really interesting woman exec who obviously on a personal level wants to nurture and encourage you but you know the minute she goes out of the room she's got to pitch you and your project to people who just don't care. (Usma, screenwriter)

The women screenwriters clearly feel that they can provide a more authentic depiction of female experiences but these examples also indicate that it is difficult for them to convince male employers of this. The screenwriter's power is likely to decrease as the film progresses from development to production:

Writers are the bottom of the rung, sadly. They start off at the top of the rung, then by the time the film's made, they're at the bottom [laughs]. You know most of them say 'I won't even get a ticket to the premiere'. (Vicky, employer)

The creative control of a film will at some point be transferred to the director, who usually assumes authorship or at least is viewed as having the ultimate 'vision' for the final piece. In the next section I examine the role of the director and the power they have in the process of selecting which films get made – and which screenplays are left on the shelf. I will demonstrate how this problematizes the need for shared habitus in creative collaborations, or at least indicates the necessity of increased diversity in decision-making roles.

7.1.2. The director's choice.

...you just know watching half of them 'that's got to be written by a man' you just know it is and it's just something completely instinctive that, I dunno, either it gets on your nerves, or alienates you or you just don't get it, you wonder what's funny about that? And you know a woman wouldn't have written it. And maybe that's a generalization but you feel it and often it turns out to be true. So I think there are differences in subject matter, interests and maybe even taste.

(Hannah, screenwriter)

My research participants described the director as critical to securing the necessary finance to get a screenplay made into a film:

...the director's going to get the film made - film is the director's medium, the person who drives it forward. (Ian, employer)

This country is absolutely director driven, it's not writer driven. - That's going to be the first question 'Who's the director?' (Jay, employer)

I find it very difficult to green light a film without a director I'm excited by (Yvonne, employer).

Attracting a director and being able to work with them was seen as an important part of a screenwriter's job:

...because a film is a director's medium in inverted commas, you've got to get in with your director and you've got to give him a script that he really wants to do and that he feels passionate about. (Patrick, screenwriter)

Well the writer and the director they've just got to gel. They've got to understand each other's language and desires and have the same vision. (Emma, screenwriter)

This last quotation from Emma suggests that similarity of habitus might play a role in facilitating this crucial relationship. Others echoed her thoughts about collaborating with others:

...there was an affinity in terms of the tone they were going for and the vibe they were going for. (Eloise, employer)

I guess it's just easier if you're a guy dressed the same as all the other guys that come in. You've got two ticks before they've even read your work. (Vicky, employer)

For the women I interviewed this could often lead to positive opportunities and experiences:

One instance where the development process was fantastic, utterly fantastic and again, interestingly enough I was working with a group entirely with women (Catherine, screenwriter)

I have a woman who is my sort of script editor if you like - and my first assistant director is a woman and we three girls, we are so safe with each other, we are so secure with each other, and it's so creative and we laugh and we diminish the tension a lot of the time. (Hannah, screenwriter)

However, given the lack of women in all key creative and decision-making roles in the UK film industry, the opportunities for this shared habitus are likely to be limited.

For a screenwriter it seems, social similarity to the director might once again be an important factor in the success of their creative product. More than this, as I have described above, a screenwriter's habitus may also influence their subject matter and style of writing. Directors are unlikely to make more than one film a year. They therefore make very careful decisions about which projects to undertake.

I think the director they look at it and think 'am I going to immerse myself in this for the next year? This is going to be my life. Do I want it to be my life? Do I want to talk about it for days?' (Jay, employer)

There was a clearly identifiable discourse in my interviews of the director needing to feel an instinctive personal and emotional connection to the screenplay:

Directing you have to go with your gut. You have to trust your gut. That is the thing that you have to fall back on. (Frankie, screenwriter)

I think they're looking for really good stories that they believe, I guess (Jo, employer)

I think it's something that connects with them personally. Because you have to spend two years of your life making it so you have to love it. So I think each director is totally unique so who knows why they're drawn to the material because some people can be drawn to a script that's not that good but they can see something in it. (Nicola, employer)

Interestingly, Nicola's comment suggests that the screenplay's merit may have little to do with whether it is selected by a director. It is more important that something within the idea or story that connects personally with the director. This suggests that once again the habitus, as the embodiment of an individual's background, preferences, likes and dislikes, is playing a key role in which projects are selected by directors and as a consequence, are able to move forward towards production.

This is of course problematic because of the domination of wealthy white men in directing roles (Lauzen, 2015). The role was clearly positioned in my interviews as gendered.

...the director is usually male. (Laura, employer)

There's a real prejudice that film directing's a man's job as well. You know, it's like a soldier is a man's job. Being a film director is a man's job. (Colin, employer)

I can sort of understand why there aren't so many women directors (Paul, employer)

No one ever gets called a male director (Natasha, screenwriter)

In my interviews, there are several instances of participants using male pronouns when talking about directors (see Patrick and Fiona above for examples) and in contrast, there is not one instance where a participant used the female pronoun when talking about directors in general. There was, however, an awareness of female directors not getting work:

If you look at short films being made there are lots of female directors and I think there's a huge problem in female directors moving from shorts to features. (Kate, employer)

I've seen lots of great women-directed shorts. I don't know why they're not getting funded. (Colin, employer)

There's so few women directors (Frankie, screenwriter)

A gendered dimension to a director's selection of projects was made apparent in my interviews:

I think what he loved about it was the father and son story and the truth of the difficulties of that and the awkwardness because you know the mum has left. (Vanessa, employer)

It would make sense, wouldn't it - if most directors are men, they respond to - loosely - male themed stories. (Paul, employer)

This goes some way to explaining why the percentage of women screenwriters in development is about 25% (Sinclair et al., 2006) but it drops to nearer 11% for films that actually get made (Lauzen, 2015, Cobb, 2014). It is clear that women screenwriters are less likely than men to have their project selected to go forward into production and that the predominance of male directors may be significant in this. Many of the female screenwriters that I spoke to had limited experience with male directors:

So if that gets made it means that all my films will have been made by women. (Catherine, screenwriter)

I've worked with three female directors (Emily, screenwriter)

I've only worked with one male director. (Natasha, screenwriter)

When they did they often expressed disappointment at the outcomes:

I did this Screen International thing. I think the only female director was (director) and I liked her and she was doing other things at the time and she's still working with the same writer that she worked with at the film school or whatever...and I remember saying to my agent 'hook me up with (director) because I'd love to work with another female...a lot of guys I've worked with are a bit wishy-washy

about stuff where as (director) was much more like 'I knew from the moment I started the script that I wanted it to be this kind of image. (Tessa, screenwriter)

Tessa's sense of creative connection to the director she met is described in individual terms but could possibly also reflect a shared understanding through gendered habitus. Usma described her experiences with directors but seemed keen to downplay any role that gender might have played:

Yes, well this particular director I really enjoyed working with but then she, I'm not sure if it was because she was a woman. I think we just sort of clicked as people. I've not had a particularly rewarding time working with any of the male directors I've worked with. No, I mean, I wouldn't say that, you know, generally, maybe with a couple of exceptions, I wouldn't say I had a great time. But I think it's probably par for the course. I wouldn't think it's particularly tricky because I was a woman and they were men. (Usma, screenwriter)

Compare this with some of the male screenwriters' views on collaboration with directors:

Personally I quite like developing scripts with the director from early on, if not from the beginning, you know, having the director involved as soon as possible, because I just think then you're creating something together and you're both pulling in the same direction again (Robert, screenwriter)

...generally I love working with directors because you're talking to the people who are going to make your films so it's always very exciting. (Patrick, screenwriter)

In addition, there was a notable comment from one of the more experienced screenwriters, Rachel, who talked about her many screenplays that are as of yet unproduced:

I mean it frustrates me because I have so many projects that are written and people like and are good and so on and you go, you know, 'if you could just all get on and make them' [laughs]. People would go 'wow! You're so productive!' You know I've done what feels like four years work in the last two and none of it is actually visible to anybody else so that is frustrating and in the end I think it would in the end if it goes on for long enough make you worried. (Rachel, screenwriter)

She doesn't directly attribute this to her gender but the discourse of the gendered nature of directors' project selection that I have highlighted suggests that it may be a key factor.

Indeed, Catherine had experienced something similar:

I then made two feature films back to back, and that was in 2006. So seven years later, since that, I have been commissioned constantly. And I haven't had another film made, but I was counting it up the other day I probably had twenty-one commissions, I think probably, twenty-one actual commissions in that time. (Catherine, screenwriter)

As I have shown in Chapter Three, feminist thinkers have successfully deconstructed the notion of gender as essential (Butler, 1990, Cameron and Kulick, 2003, Fenstermaker et al., 2002, Wajcman, 1991). Bourdieu, however, is able to offer a way to understand gender as both constructed and also a very real and lived experience. Most of those with the power to

select screenplays for production are rich, white men, and they are more frequently drawn to projects that they feel a personal connection to, which are likely to be written by and featuring, other rich, white men, limiting what makes it to the big screen.

I'm always conscious of the fact that directing is a rich boy's game...the ones who pick and choose they're privileged men, and consequently they have quite a sheltered life-view and they're quite inexperienced and they're not really interested in much, which makes it even more frustrating that they're imposing their taste on the rest of us. (Ed, screenwriter)

The next section in this chapter addresses this question of taste, and examines the way that apparently 'female' taste is viewed in the UK film industry with discernable consequences for women seeking to make a living in professional creative screenwriting.

7.2 Taste and symbolic power

Taste or judgment are the heavy artillery of symbolic violence.
(Moi, 1991, p.1026)

This section will demonstrate the usefulness of Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of social hierarchies of taste (1984) in understanding how opportunities for screenwriters are gendered. I argue that those who work in the UK film industry consider female taste inferior, of less value, and even distasteful. I then analyse how this contributes to the upholding of gender inequality in professional screenwriting work. Women are still frequently perceived as a special interest group by the film industry (Christopherson, 2009). They are ghettoized as consumers and practitioners in genres concerned with human relationships and the pursuit of romantic heterosexual love as the root to happiness (Smith and Cook, 2008).

...this period adaptation that we've got, there's a long list of female writers because it's that sensibility, it's a romantic story, I sound like such a cliché saying it out loud but I think it's true that a woman writing stories about a woman and she has an affair with someone and then she goes back to her husband. There are men that could write that and write it brilliantly but you sort of thing maybe a woman can write it slightly better? (Nicola, employer)

These stories are marketed to female audiences, and provide the majority of employment opportunities for female screenwriters (Bielby and Bielby, 2002). Although in the early days of Hollywood women made up the majority of screenwriters and scenario writers, by the

1940s, women had begun to be increasingly restricted to writing ‘women’s pictures’ or were brought in to write for successful actresses (Francke, 1994). One of the most persistent debates around female screenwriters is whether women write differently from men, have different preoccupations, styles and points of view, and whether women as viewers have different interests, needs, and tastes to men (Francke, 1994, McCreadie, 2006, Seger, 2003). Marsha McCreadie interviewed many female screenwriters who felt typecast by their gender. However Linda Seger claims that “Women’s films change the focus, often emphasizing the character’s emotions, behaviour and psychology above the character’s actions (2003, p.118) – something many male screenwriters might take issue with as well as female writers. However, Seger also demonstrates that women have successfully written ‘male’ action films and argues that denying there is such a thing as a ‘woman’s voice’ may simply contribute to the devaluing of women’s interests and stories. Taste as inscribed in the habitus offers a way to theorize the contradiction that Seger’s arguments illustrate so succinctly.

7.2.1. Gendering taste

In Nora Ephron’s 1993 film “Sleepless in Seattle” the character Suzy, played by Rita Wilson, describes the climax of “An Affair to Remember” (McCarey, 1957). Suzy’s increasingly emotional description of the film is accompanied by the male characters in the scene rolling their eyes. The film’s protagonist, Sam Baldwin, played by Tom Hanks, famously concludes her performance by declaring: “That’s a chick’s movie”. The term ‘chick’s movie’ or ‘chick flick’, suggests that some films are for female viewers, and these films are usually emotional and about love and relationships. Hank’s character then goes on to parody Suzy’s emotional description whilst talking about “The Dirty Dozen” (Aldrich, 1967), a film about a mass assassination mission of German officers in World War II. This film is held up as an example of a ‘guy’s film’, full of action and conflict and heroics – i.e.

completely different in content and tone. The little boy, Jonah, played by Ross Malinger, is depicted as not being able to comprehend Suzy's behaviour but later on in the film his young female friend instinctively has the same tearful, emotional reaction to the film as Suzy. Ephron seems to be suggesting that preferences for certain types of films emerge naturally according to one's gender. This becomes a commercial consideration for the film industry because of the distaste that boys and men come to have for anything identifying as 'female' taste, as discussed in Chapter Three. Linda Obst, who produced "Sleepless in Seattle" explains:

Girls will go to a guy movie if it's good, but guys will not go to a movie if it appears to cater to girls. (Barnes, 2013)

In 2013 the poster campaign for 'Bridesmaids' (Feig, 2011), written by Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo, led with the headline "Chick Flicks Don't Have To Suck!" (Deiseroth, 2014). Ros Gill has highlighted the problematic nature of 'women's media' (2007a), which can offer genuine pleasures to women at the same time as reinforcing gendered preoccupations and placing female concerns as 'other' to a male norm. While film scholars continue to debate the existence of a 'female sensibility' (McCreadie, 2006, Seger, 2003) the reality is that female voices continue to be side-lined in the film industries.

Critical and commercial success around female talent and female audiences is repeatedly dismissed as a fluke, an exception, as unexplainable (McClintock, 2012, Palmeri, 2012), particularly by film critics, 78% of whom are men (90% in film industry trade publications) (Lauzen, 2013b). A feminist appropriation of Pierre Bourdieu's study of the social construction of taste provides a way to understand why those with power fail to recognize the value of female stories. Just as the dominant *class* constructs its tastes and preferences as naturally superior (Bourdieu, 1984), the dominant *gender* (male) is considered to have superior and more universal tastes and preferences than the dominated (female).

In 'Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste' (1984) Bourdieu proposed that the dominant powers of a society define aesthetics, and by means of that definition, it is social class that tends to determine a person's interests, tastes, and likes and dislikes. This difference in aesthetic tastes reinforces inequalities by making 'difference' appear natural:

...art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences (Bourdieu, 1984, p.7)

This essentializing and polarizing of taste and aesthetics was described in my interviews:

...it's definitely 'oh there's a woman in the room'. And they'll say that. 'Gillian what do you think?' you know, as if like, but then other times slightly sort of a different species, 'oh you don't like action, this isn't for you anyway'. 'You're not really the audience'. (Gillian, employer)

Although subordinate social classes may appear to have equally strong views about what constitutes good taste, merit or value, there is an imbalance of power:

The working-class 'aesthetic' is a dominated aesthetic, which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics (Ibid, p.41).

This observation echoes feminist criticisms of women as the 'other' (De Beauvoir, 1949) and post-structuralist attentions to the notion of 'female' as defined by what is 'not male' (Butler, 1990, Irigaray, 1985). Feminists have long highlighted how men's lives, work and concerns have been deemed more interesting and valuable than women's (Friedan, 2013). In post-feminist cultures (Gill, 2007a) men don't often consider themselves intrinsically more interesting, but through history, education and culture, white, upper class and 'male' tastes, concerns, preoccupations and preferences are positioned as superior, and of greater worth and merit. Creative women of all classes, backgrounds and ethnicities have been marginalized by the educational and cultural establishment. Making these hidden naturalized hierarchies visible offers a way to potentially challenge their dominance:

Bourdieu's highlighting of [the] ultimately arbitrary character of social distinctions (so that, for example, what counts as 'tasteful' is an effect, not of intrinsic properties, but of social relations) gives us a way to challenge the taken-for-granted ('the doxic' in Bourdieu's terms). (Lawler, 2004, p.113)

Bourdieu recognized that taste is not simply an expression of individuality, nor is it a harmless preference for one thing over another:

Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes. (Bourdieu, 1984, p.56)

Indeed, it is one of the most effective ways that those with power are able to hold onto their power. ‘Good’ taste is displayed through symbolic violence as a natural quality of an individual, making it appear innate rather than learnt. This is particularly clear in the creative industries, where, as I will demonstrate, ‘taste’ is one of the principle ways that individuals are judged, relationships are formed, and products are chosen and promoted over others.

...taste [is] one of the most vital stakes in the struggles fought in the field of the dominant class and the field of cultural production (Ibid, p.11)

In the next section I will look at how my workers in the UK film industry discursively position female taste and how this discourse is used to account for the lack of female screenwriters.

7.2.2 The currency of taste in the UK film labour market

...you have to feel in some way confident in your taste and creative instinct. (Nick, employer)

In my interviews with screenwriters and their employers, I observed frequent references my participants made to ‘taste’, and the associations made between gender and taste. A dominant discursive pattern can be identified in which women are seen as interested in relationship dramas, whilst men are viewed as naturally inclined to write genre films full of action and special effects. This discourse has an effect in limiting employment prospects for female screenwriters whether they want to write these films or not. Many of my participants made reference to their own tastes and those of others, for example:

I learnt and I know my taste, my skills, my taste as a producer was very much formed there. (Jo, employer)

I wasn’t terribly taken with the script, and she took it very personally, thought I was challenging all of her taste. (Frank, employer)

And it isn’t really my taste either. (Frankie, screenwriter)

My own taste isn’t like that. (Laura, employer)

If you look at the BBC, or Film 4 or the BFI. It's the same people with the same taste. (Jay, employer)

Often taste was closely associated with power and money, such as in one employer's comment that "...if the tastemaker, the financier, disagrees, it's irrelevant" (Eloise, employer). Here, being a film financier appears to be synonymous with having the power of making judgements based on taste. In fact, her use of the term 'tastemaker' echoes Bourdieu's own use of the word in reference to museum curators, whom he described as artistic guides to the elite (Bourdieu, 1984). Eloise used the term in reference to powerful people who head up organizations, which financially support film development and production, giving them the power to endorse their own tastes. These are still predominantly men. Men have the dominant habitus in the film industry, are therefore perceived to have more worthwhile ideas and more valuable stories than women.

And he to this day can go in, even - amazing - two massive flops in a row and still walk into the studios and convince them. You show me a woman who could do that. (Colin, employer)

Furthermore, an understanding of taste as part of a gendered habitus can help to explain why this superior assessment of men's writing is experienced as merited, rather than a simple recognition of dominant tastes:

Legitimacy (or distinction) is only truly achieved when it is no longer possible to tell whether dominance has been achieved as a result of distinction or whether in fact the dominant agent simply appears to be distinguished because he (more rarely she) is dominant. (Moi, 1991, p. 1023)

Many of my participants talked about taste in gendered terms, a discourse in which men and women were positioned as having different interests and instinctive understandings.

For example:

I think there's a perception that women are more interested in relationships and emotions and the hidden depths and complexities of human drama, human life, quite rightly, okay? (Rob, employer)

...instinctively when you meet a male writer you think he has a better understanding of genre and therefore of audience than a female writer does (Kate, employer)

This discourse of gendered taste was clearly linked to employment opportunities for screenwriters:

...from my point of view I know that there are female screenwriters that I'll go to for drama, male screenwriters I'll go to for genre (Frank, employer)

So, there's a book that we've optioned recently which is absolutely a woman's story. It's about a female friendship and mothers and daughters and relationships, so I'm looking for a writer now and I'd ideally like to find a woman to write it. (Vanessa, employer)

More worryingly, and without any reference to data or evidence, several of my participants made a connection between women screenwriters' association with drama and the reasons why they may have trouble getting their films made. For example, here are some of the answers I received to the question "Why do you think there are so few women screenwriters?"

...because the female screenwriter is writing drama (Frank, employer)

Um - so it's what's perhaps left on the shelf are the more character-driven pieces written by more intuitive, character-interested female writers (Nick, employer)

...things that one might imagine women would write, more drama led, might be tougher to get made (Vanessa, employer)

In this discourse, taste is presented as conforming to very stereotypical gendered roles that echo the public/private dichotomy. Women are positioned as being interested in people and relationships whereas men are all about action and adventure. These types of stories are then in turn given different economic values, without taking into account other influencing factors such as production and marketing budgets. Indeed, the one genre recognized to be both 'female' and commercial – the romantic comedy - was often described in disparaging terms, echoing the by-line for 'Bridesmaids' (see above). Romantic comedies were described as 'sappy', 'soppy' and 'half-baked'.

In this extract from my conversation with Nick, it is clear that he is having to do discursive work in order to explain to me his understanding of gendered differences in taste without sounding sexist. He gets himself into uncomfortable corners and is not very successful in navigating his way out.

...teenage boys who grow up to be young adolescents they want – again, generally speaking - they want the brash loud thriller things, they want 'The Fast and the Furious' and the superhero movies and um - loads of explosions and car chases. You know I'm sure there have been countless studies exploring the relationship between violent movies and testosterone levels and pre-adolescent and men

and what can you do about that? So it's no surprise that those young boys who do turn out to be writers, who pursue that as a career, grow up to be writers who write the sort of thing that they were drawn to when they were younger, you know. It's certainly not the reverse that girls grow up to be female writers who only write sappy romantic comedies or Tinkerbell movies, you know. I think, generally speaking, female writers can be more versatile in the market place as much as anything because you know the big tent pole movies or the mainstream films their first point of access for the audience tends to be male-skewed. (Nick, employer)

Nick starts by trying to establish a natural link between boys and men and action-packed films. He even uses the discursive technique of drawing on 'experts', although the 'studies' he refers to are most likely ones trying to judge whether violent films and video games increase aggression in boys' behaviour (Anderson and Bushman, 2001). His comment "what can you do about that?" seems designed instead to make the association appear inevitable and rooted in biology. However, once he moves to extend his argument to why male screenwriters are drawn to write this type of material he quickly realizes that he is potentially limiting what female screenwriters are allowed to write and so then contradicts himself whilst at the same time reinforcing the idea that young girls prefer to watch romantic comedies and films about fairies.

What is missing from this discourse of gendered preferences is some awareness that screenwriters do not often get to choose the projects that they work on (McCreadie, 2006).

The reason I was commissioned was because they thought I would be able to write the women, the relationships between the four women at the centre. (Catherine, screenwriter)

...one of them said 'you can't write about a housing estate in Brixton, you've never been to one'. Well actually I have been to a housing estate in Brixton and no I don't actually live on one, sorry, but I have this thing called an imagination, it's amazing. And I just think, you'll take Guy Ritchie writing about East End gangsters? I can assure you he hasn't been near the East End. But they're like, 'you're a woman, you don't know about fighting'. (Emily, screenwriter)

People don't give me war movies or Sci-Fi's but I'm not interested so it's not that surprising. And certainly I do get sent 'oh this is supposed to have a strong female character in it' etc. etc. so I suppose there is that. (Rachel, screenwriter)

Certainly in my conversations with female screenwriters, few of them felt that their skills or interests were limited to female characters and romantic relationships. I asked all the screenwriters, male and female, whether there were any subjects or genres of film that they felt they either could not or would not be interested in writing. Very few expressed any kind

of limit on their abilities or interests and many who did then added a caveat that they probably could depending on the story within the broader genre. Overall the genres that were specified as uninteresting were very similar for men and women. The female screenwriters mentioned horror (four writers) and crime (two writers) but also kitchen-sink dramas (one writer), children's films (one writer) and 'chick flicks' (one writer). The male screenwriters also mentioned horror (two writers) but also science fiction (three writers), romantic comedy (two writers), drama (one writer) and female issue films (one writer). Sometimes the same people who didn't limit themselves had no problem suggesting limits on others. Most notably Jack, who answered my question as to why he thought there are fewer female screenwriters thus:

Well, I can see how the traditional genres, things like thrillers, superhero movies, horror are boys natural comfort zone, um - so many films do lean towards teenage boys, you know action, all that stuff, that's got to be part of it.

Then my very next question was about his own tastes and abilities and he answered without any apparent awareness of the parallels:

Yes. Horror. I have absolutely no interest in writing that. Um - big action movies, you know I don't have the experience for that. I'm more interested in character relationship movies compelled by a strong narrative. (Jack, screenwriter)

However, Catherine echoed the gendered perceptions of her employer suggesting she has taken on these gendered associations in her own habitus:

But what I thought I can't do is, I thought I can't do the action, the car chases, I can't do the heist bit. I can do the plotting, I can't do the crime. I can't do all the technical things. Oh but yes I'm a woman and I can do all that emotional stuff. (Catherine, screenwriter)

This may also imply that many of the female screenwriters who have found some success in the UK may be those who conform to the expectations of commissioners about what women can write.

As I highlighted in Chapter Two, some of the biggest box office successes of all time illustrate clearly that women can and *do* write films that are full of action and heroics and appeal to broad audiences. For example "The Lord of the Rings" (Jackson, 2003), written by

Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens; “The Hunger Games” (Ross, 2012), written by Suzanne Collins based on her own novel – the fastest-selling non sequel ever (McClintock, 2012); “The Empire Strikes Back” (Kershner, 1980) written by Leigh Brackett – recently voted the best film ever (Daily Mail Reporter, 2014). These sorts of examples are not frequent but they do trouble the notion that women’s tastes and talents are limited. Indeed, the success of female screenwriters was also repeatedly framed as being due to their ability to write like men, or to write so that their gender is not obvious, much the way American director Kathryn Bigelow has had success:

I mean the point, in fact the celebration, of her by audiences, by critics, is that you wouldn’t know she was a woman, because she can direct a war film. (Yvonne, employer)

There were repeated references by my participants during our conversations to Jane Goldman writing “Kick Ass” and “X-Men” (Vaughn, 2010, Vaughn, 2011), Kelly Marcel writing “Mad Max” and “Terra Nova” (Cassar et al., 2011, Miller, 2015) and Lucinda Coxon writing “Crimson Peak” for Guillermo del Toro (del Toro, 2015) as signs that women screenwriters were becoming more successful. Less if any mention was made of Laura Wade writing “The Riot Club” (Scherfig, 2014), Misan Sagay writing “Belle” (Asante, 2013), Abi Morgan’s screenplay “Suffragette” (Gavron, 2015), or even another of Kelly Marcel’s scripts: “Saving Mr Banks” (Hancock, 2013) which was being released at the time of my interviews. It’s worth noting that three of these four screenplays were made into films with female directors. Female screenwriting success then, is often defined by the UK industry as women writing films that men like. This clearly conflicts with the sort of films that the employers believe women want to write. If we are going to be able to include stories by and about women on the big screen, decision makers and powerful financiers need to understand that their taste is subjective, constructed and not necessarily shared by significant portions of the audience.

7.3. Conclusion.

Currently in the UK film industry, white, heterosexual, able-bodied male taste is dominant and anyone who does not share these tastes risks having their creative preferences judged as less valuable and even distasteful by those with the power to finance films, most of whom are still rich white men. Female screenwriters are associated with less commercial stories simply because of their gender and can find themselves restricted to writing films that predominantly revolve around relationships and the pursuit of love, despite evidence that they can very successfully write big, funny, action-packed box office hits. Indeed, it may only be when they find a way to write such films that they are seen as having real talent enough to compete for jobs alongside male screenwriters. When women write successful films about the female experience it is most often chalked up as an anomaly or side-lined into a specialist ‘for women’ category. Rarely is the success followed up with copycat films or sequels. I have argued that the construction of gendered taste plays a significant role in this as male critics and audiences often find female taste frivolous and distasteful.

This distaste has very real consequences in upholding the lack of opportunities for female screenwriters, as these judgements of taste appear natural and meritocratic rather than constructed and contentious. Female screenwriters are disadvantaged in a way that is self-fulfilling and difficult to circumnavigate. They are perceived as having innate female taste, which is considered less commercial and resulting in films that only women will watch. They are shut out from the biggest budgets and the most action-packed genres. These films are then made by and targeted at men and boys and often do not show a nuanced understanding of women as characters or include their views of the world. Indeed, this can mean women are more likely to want to watch films that *do* contain female characters and perspectives. If women wish to pursue a career in screenwriting, they are likely to be influenced by the films they grew up watching. However, these films are not valued by the industry, even when they

succeed, making it difficult for female screenwriters to sustain a career. Conversely, should they wish to shrug off the shackles of stereotyped gendered taste, or break new boundaries, they are likely to be considered less knowledgeable and therefore less trustworthy than their male colleagues.

Jo observes that it's about "what do we define as scale and what do we define as interesting?" Until these definitions are understood as subjective and not universal, it's difficult to see how inequality of opportunity will be addressed in the UK film industry. One senior UK decision-maker that I interviewed believed it was important for female filmmakers to have a detailed knowledge of the 'canon' of film history:

I say 'get out there, watch a lot the stuff because you can bet all those nerdy boys are and they know their stuff' you know, you can't just become a filmmaker, you've got to know your onions and I tend to say that men tend to be more sort of cinephile types than women (Martha, employer).

However, she was not willing to make any allowances for women based on the lack of available films with a female sensibility, world-view or protagonist:

So I kind of think you have to grow up and if you're a woman filmmaker and interested you've got to be interested in everything. You've got to learn from the great masters, and I use the word 'masters' in the very obvious sense of the word, you know, look at why Hitchcock works, look at why Walter Hill works, you know, look at how Michael Mann works, what I'm sort of saying is you can't say I'm not going to study how film works because I'm not seeing myself represented. (Martha, employer)

This is a simplistic view that downplays the experience of being asked to repeatedly engage with a protagonist whose concerns and preoccupations are so unlike your own. My research provides ample evidence that male financiers find this difficult to do, so why should it be any different for young women, whose own habitus, tastes, preferences and experiences are not explored with any frequency in film? The idea that women should be able to see beyond this and feel equal excitement and engagement with the medium as men is another clear form of inequality. Whilst film school syllabi or published lists of the 'best films' (Berger, 2015a), still continue to include less than a handful of female filmmakers, the required foundation for a career in film remains unequal. White men are able to tap into and be inspired by a rich

cinematic history of stories by and about those who share their habitus and life experiences in a way that women and BAME filmmakers are not.

Female creative workers in the UK film industry seem aware of this difference but find it hard to articulate:

I think you can't separate the gender from your point of view. I don't think it means women can only write about women and men can only write about men. At all. Um - but I do think that it has to matter at some kind of DNA level that we may not necessarily clearly articulate every time we write a story. (Jo, employer)

Women differ massively from woman to woman but there is a common experience that is probably based on - genetics, although I'm very sceptical about genetics, definitely society and how you're treated and what opportunities you have and all that comes through in the way you write but not necessarily in an obvious way. (Kate, employer)

Habitus allows an understanding of how men and women may indeed write about the same subject in a different way, as may Africans or Europeans, heterosexual and lesbian writers, CIS-gender or trans-gender individuals, and so on. Habitus is a way to understand experience as both constructed and lived so that the individual cannot help but bring a unique perspective to creative work. This is a strong argument for why it matters that the majority of screenwriters are white, rich, CIS-gender, heterosexual men. Even if they do create stories about poor, BAME, lesbian, disabled women, they will most likely be unable to provide the same perspective on those experiences as a diverse range of female screenwriters could. As one BAME participant understood:

[It's] about having been on the receiving end of something and how when you're telling a story the different nuances that say being a Muslim woman writing, or being a Muslim man writing, as opposed to being a white man writing. (Esther, employer)

I will now draw together all my conclusions and highlight the contributions that my research has made.

CONCLUSIONS: MOVING BEYOND NUMBERS

Everything we do is about looking for quality, and we often lament that there aren't enough women writers. I think there would never ever be a moment where we would turn down a woman who was of top quality or as good as any men. There would never be any prejudice, ever, in our company. And we actively look for women writers and we would love there to be more women writers and more women directors. I don't see the barrier. I don't know where it is. (Greg Brenman, producer)

Whilst I was in the process of finishing this thesis, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) released its latest data on the creative industries workforce in the UK (DCMS, 2015). The report is new, but it presents the same familiar story. Despite increases in the overall number of people employed, the percentage of women in film (and many other creative industries) has declined within the last few years. As I argued in Chapter Three, these numbers are important because they identify the problem, and there is a real need for more detail and continuity in the UK if we are to understand the situation properly, as I will come back to later in this chapter. However, it is also time to move beyond the numbers in order to understand why, despite an increased awareness of inequality and an appetite for change, women remain underemployed in the UK film industry. My research makes a significant contribution to understanding what lies behind the numbers, and therefore points the way to the kind of changes needed if we are to ever see more equality of opportunity in the UK film industry and other CCIs.

In January 2013, as part of my research, I attended a BAFTA 'Masterclass' at the Institut Français in London entitled "Why don't more women write for TV?" (BAFTA Masterclass, 2013). I was disappointed to hear the usual neoliberal arguments being made by members of the female screenwriting panel such as women needed to work harder, make their own opportunities and were perhaps choosing not to write for "Dr Who" and other male-dominated programmes. When audience member Greg Brenman, a very senior and experienced television producer, made the comment that I have quoted at the start of this chapter, I was struck that he found this an acceptable statement to make, particularly in a

room full of mostly women – many of them screenwriters. When I began this research, I had been focused, like Brenman, on where the missing women were, desperate to see more female-written films. But my anger and outrage at his suggestion that good female screenwriters are just so hard to find helped me understand that I had come to view the problem very differently.

My thinking had been enriched by the theorists that I have drawn upon in the preceding chapters, in particular on the social construction of gender, the individualizing discourses of neoliberalism and Bourdieu's demonstration of the symbolic violence of judgements of taste. I have also gathered evidence that successful films involving women in key creative roles have been repeatedly written off as anomalies and that women were less likely to see their screenplays get made into films than men. Brenman's claim to be without prejudice, whilst making what seemed to me to be a sexist comment, echoed what I'd heard in my interviews, and whilst working in the film industry. Now I considered the possibility that the women *were* there – as they were in that theatre – but older, white male employers, like Brenman, simply were not able to recognize their ability and the value of their stories. Indeed, is it hard for women to even see themselves in the role of screenwriter, in an industry where the senior roles, the directors, the highest paid actors, and the imagined audience are still predominantly men?

In this chapter I will return to my original research question and draw together the central arguments of my thesis. I will summarize my key findings and suggest areas for future research that arise from my work. I will finish with a description of how my own life and work has been influenced by my studies and some suggestions for addressing inequality in screenwriting and other creative professions.

Summary of key contributions.

Before moving on to a more detailed description of the main findings in my thesis, I would like to briefly outline my original contributions. In this thesis I have presented an analysis of interviews with screenwriters and their employers in order to understand why so few films have female screenwriters. My research is unusual in creative labour studies in that my empirical data included the experiences and opinions of employers as well as the creative labourers themselves. My own experience working in the British film industry gave me unprecedented levels of access to both senior figures and those struggling to be visible. In addition, simply by talking to many of my participants I helped to raise consciousness of gender inequalities in the film industry and many have remained interested to hear my findings, as indeed have others that I didn't interview. A significant contribution and focus of this thesis is not simply documenting inequality but accounting for the lack of change. I have answered Ros Gill's (2014) call for more nuanced understandings of gender inequality in practice and unpacked some of the main social, educational and environmental dimensions of creative work.

Using discourse analysis I have shown how the talk of UK film industry workers contributes to a limiting of possible embodiments of the screenwriter subject position and, in particular, how this leads to a positioning of men as more inherently suitable to screenwriting work. I have also demonstrated how discursive work is done which limits opportunities for female screenwriters and the stories they are expected and indeed allowed to tell. However, I have also been able to disrupt and problematize these established discourses and offer some alternative readings of screenwriting work, which could provide more opportunities and recognition for women. For example I have built on key writing about creative identities to show that some contributions to the collaborative process of writing a screenplay are considered more important than others.

Driven by a desire to understand the precise mechanisms of how informal recruitment practices uphold gender inequality, I found that screenwriters need to be in either a personal or professional relationship with one of the key financiers or production companies to access the most lucrative work. I identified the continued reliance on nepotism, homophily and trust in the recruitment of screenwriters. I describe the triple disadvantage of motherhood – assumptions about its impact on women workers, the continued positioning of women as the ‘default parent’ and the disproportionate sacrifices women are still more likely to have to make or even consider in order to become parents. Despite all this, I also observed a common disarticulation of gender and racial inequality by a foregrounding of class and financial inequality. This was particularly surprising given the prevalence of privately educated and independently wealthy individuals thought by my participants to make up a majority of film industry workers in the development sector.

Finally I applied Bourdieu’s work on class and taste to argue that taste is also constructed along gendered lines. Female ‘taste’ is considered inferior to male taste and less universal. This impacts on the type of work women screenwriters are employed to do, and the status of that work. It also has a dramatic effect on audiences, since men can feel discomfort or even distaste at the idea of going to see a film with a female protagonist or themes, locations and storylines that are socially constructed as feminine. Whilst the male equivalent are unproblematic for women, men’s stories and concerns continue to dominate at the box office. I will now discuss three key areas of my findings in a little more detail before suggesting some possible future directions for research suggested by my conclusions.

Discursive work limiting possible embodiments of the screenwriter subject position.

In Chapter Four I identified some key discourses about creative workers in the talk of my participants. These highlighted the entrenched view by film workers that their industry is

a meritocracy where special creative individuals can reasonably expect to have a successful career if they are born with the talent and remain committed. Film workers believe that both the talent and commitment of these special individuals can be demonstrated by their willingness to devote every possible minute to the pursuit of their screenwriting art, prioritizing it over other aspects of life, as if inescapably driven to create. The discursive work done by this talk is to exclude from screenwriting anyone who has commitments that might prevent them from showing such devotion, most notably women with caring responsibilities. Chapter Six demonstrated how women are still perceived as the most natural caregivers of children, and frequently do have primary responsibility for the majority of childcare and associated labour. Motherhood was positioned discursively by my participants as an essential aspect of women's nature, and women were perceived as choosing motherhood over a career, leaving little room for discussion about the difficulties of combining both, or whether men should take equal responsibility for childcare and other domestic and caring responsibilities.

Studying screenwriters, however, offered me a chance to critique motherhood as the preferred explanation for why women do not succeed in a variety of professions. Many of my participants believed the characteristics of screenwriting work – such as the freedom to work where and when you chose - allow more accommodation of caring responsibilities than other film roles, particularly those involved in film production such as the director. Indeed, for those with the economic resources and familial support it can be possible to consider a screenwriting career, although this still makes it difficult for a large proportion of the female population as I demonstrated in the second half of Chapter Six. More critically, by suggesting that creativity is an innate quality of certain individuals, and then positioning women as naturally nurturing whilst men are driven and 'pig-headed', men are seen as more inherently suited to screenwriting work. However, motherhood alone cannot account for the dismally

low participation of women in screenwriting work and my thesis has identified some other key areas where discrimination and inequality are reawakened and reinforced.

Reliance on homophily, and its recognition through an individual's habitus.

Drawing on discourse analysis I was able to identify alternative discourses that contradict the more widely accepted notions of the film industry as a meritocracy and the screenwriter as special creative individual. My participants also talked frequently of their reliance on homophily and the importance of collaboration. Evidence of a reliance on homophily is a theme throughout my thesis, contributing to my discussions of employment processes in Chapter Five and judgements of creative material in Chapter Seven. It is also vital to understanding how the myth of the special creative individual masks and therefore upholds inequalities of access to screenwriting work. Although collaboration is a recognized and widely discussed undertaking in the film making process, it is still an individual genius that is perceived as the key to the best creative output. The employers I spoke to were particularly quick to recognize the importance of collaboration - reflecting perhaps their own input in the creative process. Both employers and screenwriters also acknowledged the way that homophily could often make collaboration a more pleasant and uncomplicated process. However, homophily also plays a role in concealing subjectivity in taste and the selection of both people and creative product. I return to this again in Chapter Seven when discussing the role of directors and financiers in choosing which films actually get made. By failing to acknowledge the full reliance on homophily in collaboration, or how fundamental collaboration is to the creative process, the idea of meritocracy can be upheld. A hierarchy is created where some contributions are considered to be more valuable than others – with corresponding remuneration and respect. As I argue in Chapters Three and Four, the screenwriting role is frequently positioned as more suitable for men, whilst the development

role is similarly positioned as female. Although women do write and men do hold development positions, women are often seen as naturally having the skills and disposition to nurture male screenwriters, and men who hold development positions are often given senior roles and more recognition. This echoes Elisabeth Kelan's study of ICT workers, where men who exhibit the traits more regularly attributed to women such as good communication skills are given more credit and recognition because these aspects of their role are viewed as not naturally occurring in men as they are in women (Kelan, 2009).

Screenwriters are frequently considered to be superseded by the director as the author of a film. During the creation of the screenplay, however, their authorship is unquestioned, despite input from a range of others, and can only be diluted by other screenwriters. Many of the employers I spoke to illustrated a desire and even attempts to turn to screenwriting themselves, perhaps borne out of a frustration with handing over their ideas and skillsets for little recognition. However, my research suggests that success in crossing over from another position in the film industry into screenwriting is heavily gendered, with men far more likely to succeed. The discourses of creativity and meritocracy used by film industry workers fail to recognize the social, educational and environmental dimensions of creativity. They assume a level playing field for anyone wishing to pursue a screenwriting career. But while the roles of producers, executive producers, directors and other valued positions remain dominated by men, it is impossible for women to have the same chances of finding homophily in their employers and collaborators.

The social and informal nature of finding and securing work in the UK film industry means that homophily plays a key role for anyone seeking to build a career as a screenwriter, as I explore in Chapter Five. I have shown that nepotism, social and educational capital are frequently referenced by film workers as aiding entry to film work, but also how acknowledgement of these benefits conceals evidence of disadvantage due to gender or race.

My research data are peppered with references to social occasions and on-going personal relationships whereby similar and like-minded people identify and befriend each other, a widely practiced recruitment process in the film industry. Creative roles in film were discursively positioned as requiring the worker to have a personal, emotional and often instinctive response to the project. As a result it was seen as important by my participants to work with others who understand and share your sensibilities. It eases communication and helps to avoid creative conflicts. The habitus acts like a shorthand and enables people to identify those with whom they are most likely to share similarities of taste and background. I problematize this by drawing attention to the fact that the most powerful positions are dominated by people with very similar habitus compared with the population as a whole. In Chapter Seven I also illustrate the way that gendered habitus leads to fewer opportunities for women in screenwriting. I argue that it is critical to understand that those with the dominant habitus can fail to recognize the value of those unlike themselves. In culturally influential industries like film this frequently leads to stories and storytellers of the dominant habitus being the most valued and therefore most frequently seen by audiences. This in turn upholds the perception of these stories as more important and more valuable than others.

My research shows that women, the lower classes and BAMEs are unable to break into the creative roles in the UK film industry in great numbers because the dominant habitus of those already inside the industry is that of wealthy white men. To even take part in the field of the UK film industry is difficult for anyone with a different habitus, since the habitus is not a choice, but the sum of a person's social position, experiences and upbringing. An individual's habitus, expressed through the minutiae of their appearance, interests, preoccupations and other gathered and embodied signifiers, is read by potential employers in social situations, in recruitment processes and in the creative work itself. Since an individual's capital is embodied in the habitus through an elaborate and lengthy learned

process of tiny details, it is difficult for anyone who isn't white, rich or male to replicate or acquire the necessary symbols of taste and belonging, even if they are prepared to conform to the dominant preferences. In this way, undesirable new entrants – and indeed those who achieve a degree of success – are more likely to be excluded from the most lucrative employment opportunities as much for their tastes and preferences as for their appearance and connections. My participants described ways that they used social and educational capital and altered their dress and appearance to try to fit in, but they still face barriers to success if they attempt to introduce projects or characters that the dominant habitus does not recognize or value.

Outsiders may find a way to be accepted if they convincingly play the game – by making films for and about men, for example like Kathryn Bigelow, becoming the only female director to win an Oscar in the process. Often, however, this is only possible with access to a surplus of other forms of capital, in particular economic and social. Exceptions are possible, but they are frequently held up as just that – exceptional, and ignored as a proven business model by male practitioners and investors. The romantic notion of the artist discussed in Chapter Four is also at work here, facilitating the idea that individual genius is a rare commodity and concealing the processes of luck, hard work, advantage and forms of capital which may have played a part in someone's success.

The symbolic violence of gendered taste.

Pierre Bourdieu's work on taste production and cultural capital can facilitate an understanding of how dominant players maintain the perception that their own preferences are 'naturally' better than others in a way that discriminates against those of working class origin. Those in possession of greater cultural capital show "strong degrees of disgust or revulsion" (McRobbie, 2005, p.128) towards those who do not share their tastes. My thesis

contributes to the growing body of evidence that shows how Bourdieu's theories are equally applicable to gender. Women's tastes and preoccupations, which can be generalized as different to men's only as the lived consequences of socialized gender construction, are misunderstood and marginalized by the predominantly white male film industry. Whilst women, already encouraged to be other-oriented, learn by omission to engage with stories of the preoccupations of a male habitus, 'women's films' are apparently of limited interest to a male cinema audience. As I demonstrate in Chapter Seven, women are consigned to a small niche, expected to write smaller stories focused on human relationships, predominantly exploring the pursuit of romantic (heterosexual) love, the principal point at which female lives intersect with heterosexual men's lives. Rarely do they get the chance to explore other aspects of their existence through the cinematic experience, whether central to the female experience, like motherhood, or central to the human experience, like survival. In addition, the cinema women are allowed to participate in is simultaneously devalued as frivolous and overly emotional.

Those who hold power cannot admit that their cultural competences and symbolic capital have in fact been 'learnt' through socializing and then upheld as having greater value purely by the recognition of their peers. Acknowledging the constructed nature of judgements of taste and superiority would make it much harder to lay claim to the limited resources available for film production. I had initially hoped that key intermediaries would interpret and reveal the prejudices of others, but as I have shown, the confidence of the dominant habitus is such that they actually saw no problem in reproducing their own socially constructed ideas of what constitutes good or important work. Women were seen as able participants when they proved themselves capable of writing stories that fit with the dominant view – stories perceived to be for a male audience and about male characters. Universal human concerns like relationships and parenting, which are attached particularly to women

and girls through a process of socialized learning, are constructed rather than innate and therefore not relevant to all women at all times in their lives. However, these socialization processes are also likely to produce a very different way of experiencing the world, different perspectives and some different preoccupations. The habitus allows us to understand why it isn't sufficient to explore the world via stories that are predominantly told from a rich white male perspective, or to continue to see that as the gold standard to which others must learn to conform if they want success. Increasing the number and variety of women's voices as screenwriters – and directors – can only help complicate the view that women are all the same. When women are so scarce, any position they hold or product they make is often held up as representative of all women. We desperately need not just more, but more diverse female voices in order to deconstruct the category of women, their tastes and interests. We cannot make the playing field level by trying to take gender out of the equation. This leads to women only having real success when they can behave like men, for example not having babies or writing films about soldiers. Equal opportunities law understands that different people may require different approaches in order to provide a real equality of opportunity. Whilst the work that women do – in the workplace and at home – is not considered to be as valuable as that of men, we cannot hope to eradicate inequality.

Future directions for research.

My own research has highlighted for me the need for further studies in three key areas: women as workers in the film industry, other forms of inequality in the film industry and gender inequalities in other creative industries. This section will briefly consider each of these in turn. This thesis is, to my knowledge, the first detailed study of gender inequalities in a particular filmmaking profession. My focus on the employers of screenwriters is particularly unique in creative industries research and provides much-needed discussion of

the recruitment processes – both overt and unconscious – to which creative professionals are subject. One clear indication of my analysis is a pressing need for research into the creative managers themselves: who holds these positions and how these professions come to be gendered. Indeed, I propose that there is an urgent need to examine all the gatekeepers to creative professions such as screenwriting. Agents, producers, creative writing courses and other well-trodden paths that lead to screenwriting, such as playwriting, need to be examined for further evidence of gendered practices and gendered assumptions.

However, the key creative role that my research points to as in desperate need of fine critical examination is that of the director. Using Bourdieu's theories of taste and embodied capital I have shown that the desire for a film director to respond personally and instinctively to a piece of screenwriting can substantially disadvantage women screenwriters whilst the percentage of female directors remains around 7%. It is therefore extremely important to understand – and remove – the barriers to women directors. Although I would expect such a study to draw many similar conclusions to my own examination of screenwriters (some of my participants were indeed directors as well as screenwriters), this would only strengthen my arguments and provide more evidence of the critical points where change might happen (see my final section below).

Indeed, I would argue that more research is needed across all film roles as to their gendered assumptions and practices. Patterns are observable across the current available studies of gender in creative professions. Ros Gill's radio workers suggested that women had a lack of interest in applying for jobs in a way that is very similar to my participants' assertions that women are too sensible to pursue a screenwriting career (Gill, 2000). Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton (Taylor and Littleton, 2012) observe the same conflicts between caring and creative work in the art world that I found in my fieldwork, and that Mark Banks and Katie Milestone argue also exist for new media workers (Banks and

Milestone, 2011). The reluctance of Christina Scharff's classical musicians to actively promote their abilities echoes the positioning of women in my study as more naturally taking up the shadowy position of nurturing male creative workers (Scharff, 2015). Adding to this growing body of work can only strengthen our understanding of new and old forms of discrimination in practice and eventually permit some bolder claims across professions and industries about mechanisms that uphold inequality.

I believe my study also highlights the need for urgent research into the position of BAME screenwriters and a focus on the role that class plays in screenwriting careers. I have demonstrated how both of these are particularly problematic in the UK film industry and yet very little is known about the dynamics of these axes of inequality. I also suggest that some consideration is given to the extension of Bourdieu's theories to an understanding of continued racial inequality in creative work. Neither race nor class is directly comparable to gender in the way that inequalities are produced and reinforced but they share the position of dominated to a dominant taste and habitus. An examination of the similarities between these different forms of inequality would be helpful as well as a deeper understanding of the ways in which they are different, and indeed the implications at the points of intersection.

Lastly my research makes a contribution to a growing body of work on the continued gender inequalities at work, and particularly in creative professions, such as those that I have mentioned above. After being submerged in the film industry for so many years as a worker, I began this study thinking that the film industry was lagging behind other professions in achieving gender equality. Sadly, I have been led to an increased awareness of the prevalence of gendered assumptions and consequential discrimination in many labour markets, and particularly in creative professions. Thankfully, data is very slowly beginning to emerge to highlight the extent of these inequalities, as it did for me in film and hopefully this can inspire similar empirical studies. It is clear that there are continued gender biases and

discriminatory practices in industries such as publishing (Franklin, 2011), popular music (Negus, 2002), gaming (Sarkeesian, 2015), theatre (Gardner, 2012), and the intersection with other forms of inequality, such as the lack of black female dancers in professional ballet companies (Goldhill and Marsh, 2012). Each of these fields, and more, deserve focused attention to understand the particular mechanisms at play, as well as the shared cultural assumptions that need to be recognized if they are ever to be challenged. In the final section of this chapter I will now propose some possibilities for change arising from my own research – on a personal level and suggestions for wider involvement of interested parties.

What can be done?

During the course of my interviews, one recurring discourse amongst my participants was a firm belief that things were getting better for women screenwriters in the UK film industry. I argued in Chapter Four that the rhetorical function of this is to release the speakers from feeling any guilt, or actively taking responsibility for change. However, it is also clear from the growing body of available data that this is not the reality of the situation, as can be seen in the latest report from the DCMS to which I referred at the start of this chapter. Although more detailed and nuanced research is needed, particularly on other key roles, as I have discussed above, my study has highlighted particular ways that inequality is perpetuated in creative professions. In this final section, I will outline some of the possible courses of action that are suggested by my work, and some of the ways that my own career has been influenced.

I have been excited and outraged in equal measures by what I have learnt in the course of this study. Outraged by the extent of gender inequality both within the film industry and outside. Excited by the possibility of articulating the problem and thereby beginning the process of change. As I began my fieldwork I was struck by the lack of understanding of the

position of women screenwriters amongst my participants. I felt obligated as a passionate advocate of equality to increase awareness in the UK film industry. For me, social media provided an opportunity to do this. The socialized nature of creative professions was something that I could actually utilize since many of my former colleagues and associates were friends with me on Facebook and Twitter. I began to highlight evidence of continued gender inequality and occasionally, I pointed towards some of the possible reasons for it. Although this was sometimes upsetting when an article that I posted turned into a public debate, it gave me an opportunity to talk directly to those people that I wanted to think about the position of women in film. It also forced me to articulate my new understandings. I gained many supporters as well as a few critics, and perhaps lost a few friends, but I also found some powerful allies. I continue to use social media to contribute to an awareness of gender inequality in film.

As a result of all this activity I secured a position for the Women's Film and Television History Network as their social media officer and now find stories and reports for their Facebook and Twitter accounts. I have grown their support base and created a more public profile for the network. I am also part of a founding committee for "Raising Films" (www.raisingfilms.com), an organization that is trying to improve the situation for parents, particularly mothers, working in the film industry. I am still frequently asked to read screenplays and speak to aspiring screenwriters and now I am always careful to make them aware that my advice may be of little help due to the potential barriers that some people face. I also try to suggest what they might do to mitigate or navigate discrimination as best they can. I am delighted to have secured a research position at the University of Southampton on the AHRC funded research project "Calling the Shots: Women and contemporary film culture in the UK, 2000 to 2015". This three-year study will provide much needed data and analysis of the position of women in the UK film industry and make a significant contribution

to the gaps in knowledge that I highlighted in the last section. The project is particularly exciting because it is working with key partners in the film industry itself and therefore stands a good chance of having some impact on the women who work, or want to work in film in the UK.

On that note, it is perhaps appropriate that I conclude this thesis with some thoughts on how my own research can inform film industry practitioners, particularly those with a responsibility for employing screenwriters. I am nervous of doing this because the solutions are not as simple or easily implemented as some might hope, as I once did. Screenwriters may feel frustrated that my focus is less on what they can do, as I believe a turn away from neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and choice is fundamental to real change. My eyes are on the employers, and on the structural and discursive mechanisms that currently do not allow change to happen. Film workers of all roles and responsibilities must become aware of their own subjective judgements and open to the possibility of alternative ways of working and talking about creative jobs that allows a greater diversity of people to participate.

With homophily so key in recruitment processes and creative collaborations, it is vital that women have as large a pool to choose from as men do. It is not a new idea to advocate for more women in senior and powerful positions, but my research highlights the need for caution when assessing candidates for even these roles, which are often subject to the same judgements of taste and merit. Just like screenwriters, it is likely that homophily and shared habitus is playing a key part in these appointments. It is important to have an awareness of subjective judgements, a recognition of implicit bias, and most crucially to enable a process of taking risks and hiring beyond comfort zones. This is a practice that could be adopted in all recruitment practices in the film industry. One of my participants told me that she is frequently contacted by colleagues in other companies who are hiring development personnel

for example, and who express doubts about a potential employee's taste. My research indicates that by only hiring personnel who share their taste, employers are potentially restricting the recognition of projects that may have huge value for those unlike themselves, including large sections of a cinema audience.

Women are not all the same and because there is a much smaller number of female directors and financiers, it is therefore much harder for women to find others who might understand their stories and characters. This recommendation to diversify the employers is a good example of how my research may also be applicable to different types of discrimination. There is clearly a similar need for a larger number and variety of collaborators and enablers from a range of class backgrounds and ethnicities, sexualities and differing abilities. It is time for rich white men to relinquish their dominance of the most powerful positions. Indeed, there is an argument for those organizations funded with public money to actively seek to redress the gender imbalance in the private sector by ensuring that their funds are controlled by women. Past evidence has shown this to be effective in increasing opportunities for women, even though these positions are not able to work without male co-financiers (Steele, 2013).

Those that work in the film industry have a responsibility to reflect on the impact of believing that they exist in a meritocracy and to try to understand the ways that these working conditions are actively excluding people. Deeply held assumptions about creativity and audiences seem to thrive even in the face of contrary evidence and function more to uphold the status quo than to serve the creative and commercial ends they profess to. This is not a trivial matter. Film workers are in the business of creating narratives and subject positions through which viewers can reflect on their own lives and possibilities. How can we continue to justify the exclusion of female voices, female characters, and female agency from having equal footing in this process? I appeal to decision makers to question the objectivity of their

judgements and to understand that their tastes are not always universal or shared by large sections of potential audiences. The evidence exists to challenge myths and long standing beliefs if we are prepared to listen.

I believe my research has implications for an audience that is wider than the employers of screenwriters, or indeed the film industry. A wider cultural change would help to improve the situation for women screenwriters and so this last paragraph is directed to anyone interested enough to want to help creative women, to improve gender equality more generally or increase the diversity of available films in cinemas. Much of it is about challenging gendered assumptions and segregations, from birth, through toys and education and into the workplace. It is about men taking equal responsibility for having children. Indeed it is society recognizing the need for new generations so that even those who choose *not* to have children understand the fairness of making allowances for those who do, in the knowledge that they are raising future tax-payers, doctors, bankers, road sweepers and story tellers. More specifically, my research suggests that it is vitally important to make it more acceptable for men and boys to show interest in women and girls and anything that has become culturally labelled as feminine or female. Specifically, it is essential that men see stories about women as frequently as women see stories about men. It's also important that we break down the binary by seeing stories about and by those who identify as everything in between. Men need to relearn the lost childhood art of seeing girls and women as people just like them. This will help establish women as an accepted point of empathy, acknowledge shared concerns and universal themes through female characters and engender genuine interest in unfamiliar preoccupations caused by gendered habitus. My hope is that this will be a crucial tipping point that begins a process whereby women are allowed equal opportunities as screenwriters, film audiences and human beings.

Appendix 1: Notes on transcribing

I transcribed all the interviews myself. The following notes refer to quotations from interviews, and are provided for the benefit of the reader:

- ... indicates parts of sentence omitted
- indicates a pause
- [] indicates additional information provided for the reader.

Appendix 2: Interview consent forms.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

REC Reference Number: REP-H/12/13-5



YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

'Examining Screenwriting Careers in the UK Film Industry'

We would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

ABOUT NATALIE WREYFORD AND THIS STUDY

I am a full-time PhD student at King's College London. My research is about how screenwriters establish and develop a career in the UK Film Industries and trying to discover why some people might have more success than others. I am concerned to investigate the diversity of screenwriters working in the UK film industry with particular reference to the experiences of men and women. As part of my research I am interviewing screenwriters and employers of screenwriters about their experiences in the UK film industry. This will be an informal discussion that will take around an hour. This study will be written up into a final report that will be submitted to King's College in September 2014. After being assessed, the report will be available for public view in the King's College library.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

The interview is intended to be an informal discussion, and there are no right or wrong answers. I will start by asking some background questions about you, and then we can talk about your experiences in the UK film industry such as either :

- a) why you wanted to write for films, how you got your first break, any difficulties you encounter in finding work, etc.
- b) what you look for in a writer, where you find writers, what factors affect your decision when hiring a writer, etc.

You can choose not to answer any question, withdraw an answer or end the interview at any time, without explaining why and without negative consequences. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything you do not understand. Sometimes I might also ask you to explain something in a different way to make sure I understand you properly.

With your permission, I would like to record this interview using a Dictaphone. This will allow me to really concentrate on listening to what you say, and to check later that I have understood you correctly. Our conversation, the recording and any notes I

make during the interview will remain confidential – however, I may wish to quote you in my final report and if you prefer this could be done anonymously.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. You may withdraw any data/information you have already provided up until it is transcribed for use in the final report (February 2014). Recordings of interviews will be deleted upon transcription. All research data will be stored in anonymized form following the submission of the final report for up to 7 years. This means that other researchers will be able to use the data in future, but will not be able to identify you.

If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact the researcher using the following contact details: *Natalie Wreyford, Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS. Natalie.wreyford@kcl.ac.uk*

If this study has harmed you in any way, you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information: *Dr Christina Scharff, Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS. Christina.scharff@kcl.ac.uk*

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.



Title of Study: Examining Screenwriting Careers in the UK Film Industry

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: REP-H/12/13-5

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Please tick
or initial

- I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to February 2014, without giving a reason and without negative consequences. ☐
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998. ☐
- I agree that the research team may use my data for future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by a research ethics committee. (In such cases, as with this project, data would not be identifiable in any report). ☐
- I consent to my interview being audio recorded. ☐

Participant's Statement:

I -

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed

Date

USE, RETENTION AND REUSE OF PARTICIPANT CONTRIBUTIONS

STUDY TITLE

Examining Screenwriting Careers in the UK Film Industry

RESEARCHER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROJECT

Natalie Wreyford

KING'S
College
LONDON

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE REFERENCE NUMBER

REP-H/12/13-5

NAME OF PARTICIPANT

.....

1. IDENTIFICATION

I agree to being identified and personally associated with my contribution in this study and in any subsequent publication and use.

Yes ☐

I do not agree to being identified and personally associated with my contribution in this study and in any subsequent publication and use. My name must be removed and my comments made unattributable.

Yes ☐

2. ARCHIVING AND SUBSEQUENT USE

I agree to my:

Written contribution ☐

Audio recording ☐

Transcript ☐

None ☐

Being archived in a public repository for use by other researchers.

3. COPYRIGHT

In order for us to make full use of your contribution and to copy, reformat and reuse it, it is necessary that you assign your copyright to King's College London, and the researcher responsible for this project.

I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to King's College London, and the researcher responsible for this project:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Signed for the College: _____ Date: _____

4. SPECIAL CONDITIONS

Should access to your contribution be restricted for any period of time? If so explain why.

Please note that King's College London is a public body and is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This means that the College has a general legal duty to make its information public and this can include research data. Personal and confidential material is excluded though and need not usually be disclosed.

Appendix 3: Interview schedule, screenwriters

| Topic | Opening/guiding questions |
|--|---|
| Identifiers/ introductory discussion | What is it that made you want to be a screenwriter? How did you get your first film job? What are you working on at the moment? What do you consider to be your biggest success so far? Do you enjoy your work? |
| Looking for work | How do you find work? How much of your time does it take up? Do you have any help? What do you think producers/employers are looking for from a screenwriter? What makes a good screenwriter? |
| Working life | How do you know when a project is going well? What makes for a good working relationship? What happens when things aren't going right? What are the greatest difficulties for you as a working screenwriter? What hours do you expect to work? Would you like to be on a more regular salary? |
| Work-life balance | How predictable is your job? Do you make a living from screenwriting and if not, how do you supplement your income? Who does the chores in your household? Do you have children? Who looks after them when you're working? Did you consider what affect having children would have when choosing your career? |
| Working with others | Do you enjoy collaborating with others? What makes for a good collaboration? What makes it difficult? Do you enjoy working with directors? Do you have any preference whether you work with men or women? What difference might it make working with a man or a woman? |
| Gender and screenwriting | Do you think there are any differences between male and female screenwriters? What difference might it make to your career if you were a different sex? Why do you think there are so few women screenwriters? |
| Creativity | Are there subjects/genres that you could not write? Or aren't interested in? What makes a person creative? Is it possible to make a living from being creative? |

Appendix 4: Interview schedule, employers

| Topic | Opening/guiding questions |
|--|--|
| Identifiers/ introductory discussion | Tell me a bit about your company and your current projects. What is your background? How did you come to your current role? Do you enjoy it? |
| Employing Screenwriters | How do you choose a writer for a project? What is the process? What are you looking for? What makes a good writer? Have you, or would you, ever consider employing a writer on a salary? What difference might it make? |
| Working with Screenwriters | How do you know when you've got the right writer? What makes for a good working relationship? What happens when things aren't going right? How do you know when a writer is working hard on your project? What hours would you expect a writer to work? |
| Matching writers and directors | When do you like to bring a director on board? How important is it that the screenwriter and director get on? Who has the final say? |
| Gender and screenwriting | What is the ideal screenwriter like? What is their background? Characteristics? Does it make any difference if you are a man or a woman screenwriter do you think? What difference might it make? Do men and women write differently? Do men and women write about different things? Why do you think there are so few women screenwriters compared to men? And why do you think that even less women see their films get made? Do you think this needs to change? How might that happen? Whose responsibility is it? What might prevent change happening? |
| Gender and the film industry | Are you happy with the roles women play in the film industry? Do you think anything needs to change? How might that happen? Whose responsibility it is? What might prevent change happening? |
| Creativity | Have you ever considered screenwriting yourself? What happened? / Why not? What makes a person creative? Is it possible to make a living being creative? |

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